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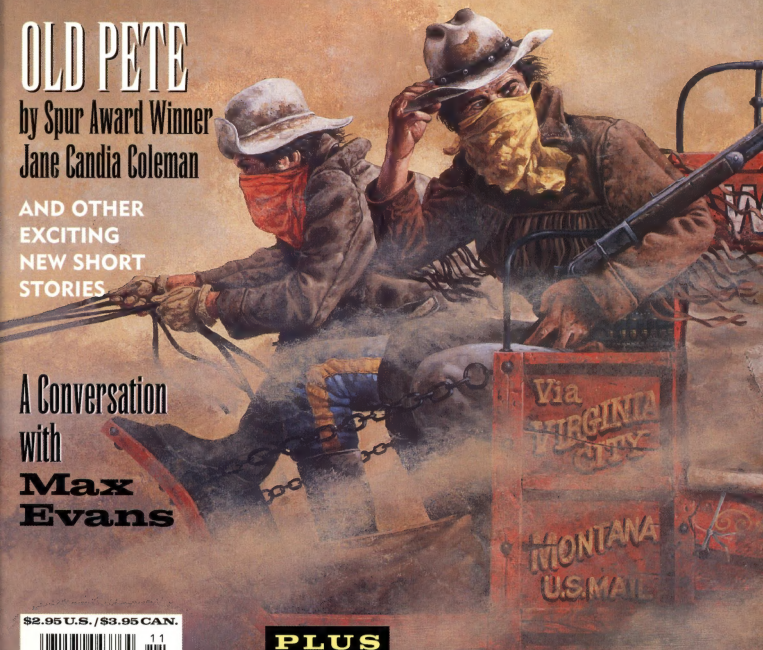

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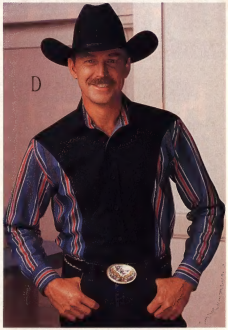

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CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES

Zapata's Gold
by Clark Howard 6

Old Pete
by Jane Candia Coleman 25

Coney Game
by Bill Pronzini 29

Jacob's Journal
by T. V. Olsen 41

The Girl I Left Behind Me
by J. A. McConney 54

Murphey and the Apache Warrior
by Ray Dorr 63

CLASSIC WESTERN STORY

Thief in Camp
by Bill Gulick 77

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Notes
by Elana Lore 4

Frontier Profile

The Legacy of Judge Isaac C. Parker
by Rheuben Buckner 85

Travel

The Alamo
by Hugh McCord 91

Interview

A Conversation with Max Evans
by Dale L. Walker 98

Cover painting: "Dust Riders," by Don Crook

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BY ELANA LORE

We have almost finished the initial tabulation of the responses to the readers' survey that was included in the premiere issue. One of the most frequent comments was about the lack of Louis L'Amour short stories in the magazine. L'Amour's son Beau explained in the guest editorial in the first issue that this magazine was his father's legacy to new writers–a place where they could hone their craft the way he did in the days of the pulps–and that none of his stories would appear in these pages.

But all is not lost for those of you wanting to read L'Amour short stories. Our sister company, Bantam Books, has published seventeen collections of them, and plans to release another one–*Valley of the Sun*–next April. These are the titles of the books:

Bowdrie
Bowdrie's Law
Buckskin Run
Dutchman's Flat
The Hills of Homicide
Law of the Desert Born
Long Ride Home
Lonigan
Night Over the Solomons
The Outlaws of Mesquite
The Rider of the Ruby Hills
Riding for the Brand
The Strong Shall Live
The Trail to a Crazy Man
War Party
West from Singapore
Yondering

For those of you who would like to read more of the work of writers appearing in this issue, here are some of the books they have recently had published or are having published in the near future.

Rheuben Buckner is a not-so-secret penname that Max McCoy uses occasionally–especially on his nonfiction in this magazine. A mass market edition of Max's first novel, *The Sixth Rider,* was just released by Bantam Books in August. This fascinating story, which speculates on the existence of a sixth rider–the Choctaw Kid–who manages to escape the violent fate of the notorious Dalton Gang on their last heist, won Western Writers of America's prestigious Medicine Pipe Bearer's Award for Best First Novel when it was released in hardcover.

Max Evans's novel, *Bluefeather Fellini,* will be out this November as a Bantam paperback. The sequel, *Bluefeather Fellini in the Sacred Realm,* is being released in hardcover by the University Press of Colorado in September.

Clark Howard, author of "Zapata's Gold" in this issue and "Showdown at Carson City" in the premiere issue, has a new book coming out in December from Otto Penzler Books. *City Blood* is a gritty crime novel that takes place in Chicago.

Bill Pronzini, whose Quincannon series in this magazine is so popular, has a book coming out in December from Carroll & Graf. It is a contemporary suspense novel set in a small northern California town, called *With An Extreme Burning.*

We hope you enjoy this issue. ■

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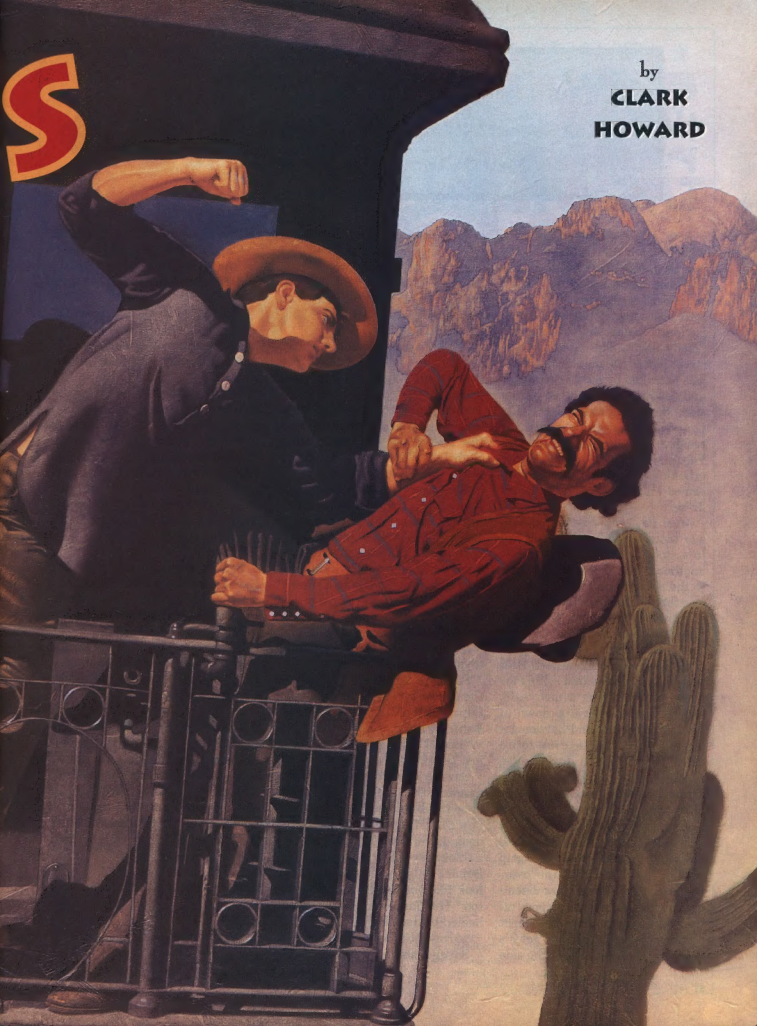
ZAPATA'S GOLD

As the Texas Southern train pulled into El Paso that windy, dusty day in 1914, Curt Savage saw at once from his window seat that it was a divided town. Bowie Street, which he could see began at the depot and ended three blocks down at the cattle pens, was split in the middle by a long length of raised wooden planks supported by barrels, to which they were nailed. On one side of the street Savage could see a bank, a hotel, various mercantile businesses, doctors' and lawyers' offices, even a theater. On the other side were saloons, gambling houses, bordellos with women in peignoirs openly lounging on the verandas, gun shops, another hotel, and an employment office for wranglers looking to hire on to help move Mexican cattle east to the railhead at Abilene.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON DOWD


S
by
CLARK
HOWARD

When Savage reached the end of the train platform, his way was blocked by three men, two of them with shotguns.

Both sides of the street were wide enough for traffic to move two ways. That traffic was mostly still men on horseback or aboard horse-drawn wagons, but there were also a few of the new alcohol-burning automobiles moving noisily about. The middle of the street where the planks divided it was patrolled by men with badges and shotguns. Beyond the bawdy side, Savage could see the Rio Grande, its waters red with clay residue, and beyond that, El Paso's sister city, Juarez, its riverbank streets teeming with armed Mexicans in semi-military dress.

Must be a new revolution, Savage thought as the train lurched to a stop. Savage had heard that another rebel army was forming in the north, building up to try to overthrow the government a second time. Might be a nice little fight to take part in, Savage thought, if he had been looking for some fighting. But he wasn't. He'd had enough of wars and killing for a while. There was a nice, safe, easy job waiting for him down in Central America, and he was going to take it. Maybe even retire down there with a little horse ranch and a dark-eyed, dark-skinned woman to cook and do other things for him.

Rising, Savage buckled on his gun belt, put on his jacket and hat, and pulled a canvas grip satchel and rifle from the overhead rack. Following other disembarking passengers, he stepped off the train onto the crowded depot platform, looked around to get his bearings, then started for the side of Bowie Street where the saloons were. When he reached the end of the platform, his way was blocked by three men, two of them with shotguns, all three wearing badges. The man without a shotgun smiled.

"Afternoon. My name's Charles L. Bender. I'm sheriff of El Paso City. Mind if I have a word with you?"

Savage glanced pointedly at the shotguns carried by the two deputies and could not help smiling slightly. "Why even ask?" he replied.

"I'm just naturally polite," said Bender. He was fifty, a little heavy, comfortable with his authority. "No offense meant and I hope none's taken, but would you mind telling me your name and what your business is in El Paso?"

"Name's Curt Savage. I'm just stopping over a couple of days on my way to Panama."

"Panama, eh? What you going to do down there?"

Savage's expression tightened the barest bit. "You the sheriff of Panama, too?" he asked quietly. Bender smiled.

"Like I said, no offense. I was just curious."

Savage thought about it for a moment, then said, "I'm signed on as a troubleshooter to guard the new canal they're getting ready to open down there."

"Sounds like a good job," Bender said, still smiling. "You look like you might be good at it, too." He glanced at Savage's low-heeled boots. "Army?"

"Army," Savage confirmed.

Savage noticed Bender taking in the ornate gold ring he'd gotten in China, the elephant-hide neckerchief slide he'd bought in Africa, and his hand-tooled Cuban gun belt.

"Looks like you've been around, all right," Bender allowed. "Rifle looks foreign made, too."

"It's a Buxley, forty-one caliber. British."

"Fine-looking piece," said Bender. He turned slightly and pointed to the wooden divider down the middle of the street. "That's the deadline. No pistols, rifles, knives, drinking, gambling, or whoring allowed on the east side. Do anything you want on the west side, 'long as you don't kill or maim nobody. Been nice talking to you."

Bender stepped aside and Curt Savage walked away. The sheriff watched as Savage went over to the west side and entered the Hotel Paree.

"Go back to your patrol," Bender presently told his deputies. "I'll be over at Western Union for a while."

That evening, in the comfortable library of United States Senator Paul Landman's home on the outskirts of El Paso, the senator, a graying, distinguished man of sixty, poured brandy for his two guests: Mal Temple, mayor of El Paso, thin, hawkish-looking, and Eloy Sanchez, mayor of Juarez, a broad-shouldered ex-*vaquero* with a goatee. The two mayors were continuing an argument begun at dinner.

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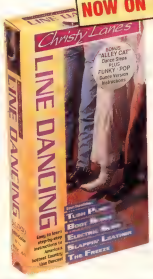

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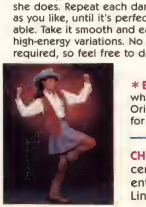

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clared. "My city is an armed camp. Young women cannot walk the streets. Children cannot play outdoors—"

"Those are *temporary* problems, Sanchez," said Temple. "They'll solve themselves as soon as the rebels move south. *My* problems are permanent. Just yesterday one of the most prosperous merchants in my town closed up and moved to Fort Worth. All because some cowboys jumped the deadline and messed up his store a little. The gamblers and saloonkeepers and whores are going to outnumber our respectable citizens soon, and they keep flooding in, mostly to do business with the rebels across the river in *your* town. Frankly, I'm about ready to ask Washington to close the bridge between the two cities."

"Washington isn't going to close the bridge and you know it, Mal," Senator Landman interjected. "It's an international border. Washington doesn't sympathize with the present Mexican government, but we can't insult it by closing a border. Anyway, President Wilson is busy with more important matters. There's a war in Europe about to break out, you know."

A servant opened the library door and Sheriff Charley Bender came in. The three politicians stopped talking at once and looked at him expectantly.

"You may have found your man, gentlemen," Bender said, taking a two-page telegram from his pocket. "This is the information the War Department sent. Full name is Curtis Clay Savage. Born in Wyoming Territory in 1884. Father was a hunter and trader; mother was a halfbreed Shoshone. Both parents died in the yellow fever epidemic in 1901. The boy made his way east and at seventeen enlisted in the First U.S. Cavalry under Teddy Roosevelt. He was with them all the way through the Spanish–American War. When his enlistment ended, he was recruited as a mercenary and went to South Africa to fight in the Boer War. He was with the British Foreign Company at Pretoria. When he got back home, he joined the U.S. Marines and fought in the Boxer Rebellion in China. He's been in one fight or another ever since."

"Excellent!" Senator Landman said. "He's perfect."

"He may not want to do it," Bender warned. "He's already got a job."

"He'll do it," the senator assured, taking a sheaf of currency from his inside coat pocket. "No soldier of fortune is going to turn down five thousand dollars."

Curt Savage shook his head.

"Sorry, gentlemen. Appreciate the offer, but I'm heading for Panama."

Senator Landman and his associates were sitting with Savage in the lobby of the Hotel Paree. "Five thousand dollars is a lot of money, Mr. Savage," the senator reasoned.

"No argument there," Savage allowed. "But I've already agreed with the Panama Canal security chief to go to work for him. Once I accept a job, I don't go back on my word. Matter of principle, Senator." Savage rose from his chair. "I'll be shopping for a good saddle horse tomorrow, and the next day be on my way to Corpus Christi and a boat for Central America."

The others also rose, and Senator Landman offered his hand. "In that case, my boy, we all wish you good luck."

After they shook hands all around, the senator, the two mayors, and the sheriff somberly watched Curt Savage get his key at the desk and disappear up the hotel stairs.

"Well, Charley, looks like you were right," the senator spoke quietly to the sheriff. "I think Mr. Savage needs a little more incentive to convince him to cooperate."

"I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this," Charley Bender said. "I kind of like the man."

"We do what we have to do, Charley," said the senator. "Take care of it."

"Yes, sir."

Sheriff Bender left the three politicians in the hotel and crossed to the St. Louis Theater on the quiet side of Bowie Street. At the entrance he paused to look at a colorful lithograph posted outside. It announced the play inside as *The Death of Jesse James,* starring an actor named Bert Woodson and an actress named Caroline York. Across the poster was a strip reading: FINAL PERFORMANCE.

Sighing resignedly, Bender entered the theater.

The next evening, Curt Savage, wearing trail clothes, returned to

"You heard me," Savage said. "You're a cheat. You dragged the last card off the bottom of the deck."

the hotel from his horse-buying task.

"Find a mount, Mr. Savage?" the desk clerk asked.

"I did, thank you. A lean little three-year-old mare; frisky, like a female ought to be. I'll settle my bill tonight and be riding out early in the morning." He brushed some dust off one sleeve. "Have the porter draw a hot bath for me, will you, please?"

In his room Savage undressed, wrapped a towel around his middle, and sat on the bed studying a map of south Texas until the porter knocked to tell him his bath was ready. Looping his gun belt over one shoulder, he took a red silk Mandarin robe from the closet and followed the porter down the hall to the hotel's bath room.

It was a long, narrow room that had ten large oak tubs raised a foot off the floor. The bottom of each tub had an iron plate under it, with a fire pan under that to heat the plate, which in turn heated the water. The room was steamy, cozy despite its size. Two Chinese towel boys scurried back and forth with liniment, herbs, oils, and soap. A barber was shaving one of three men already in the room when Savage entered.

Savage hung his robe and gun belt on a rack behind his tub, dropped the towel, and lowered himself into the soothing hot water. "Tell the barber I'd like a shave when he's available," he said to the porter. The two Chinese boys came over, one with a selection of bath ingredients, the other with a box of cigars and an opium pipe. Savaged took a cigar, had it lighted, and puffed contentedly as he had first oatmeal soap, then elderberry extract, then otter oil added to his bath. The otter oil reminded him fondly of his Shoshone mother; she had often massaged his father's tired feet with it when he was a boy.

Presently, the barber came over and lathered Savage's face with warm shaving soap. Removing the cigar from his lips, Savage rested his head back, closed his eyes, and enjoyed the mild sensation of the straight razor edging over his face.

Neither Savage nor the barber noticed that during his shave, one of the Chinese boys had picked up Savage's gun belt, concealed it under a towel, and left the room.

And neither of them noticed several minutes later when he returned it.

At ten o'clock that night, after a steak dinner at Delmonico's French Restaurant, Savage was in a three-man draw poker game at the Alamo Saloon. The other two players were a Mexican and an American army captain from the local barracks. The Mexican was winning, but not much.

Unnoticed by most, a man of about forty, wearing a black frock coat and string tie, entered the saloon, stopped at the bar to buy a glass of whiskey, then walked over to the poker game Savage was in. There were two vacant chairs in the game. The newcomer paid the house five dollars to occupy one of the chairs for an hour, and bought fifty dollars' worth of chips. The game then resumed.

Several minutes after the stranger sat down, Sheriff Charley Bender strolled in the front door and stood at the bar. A moment later, one of his deputies came in and positioned himself near the wheel of fortune. Then a second deputy walked in and went over to stand near the faro layout. Bender nodded slightly to each of them, then turned his attention to the poker table where Curt Savage sat.

The poker game reached a point where both the Mexican and the army captain had folded their cards, and Savage was playing for the pot against the man in the frock coat, who was dealing.

"Bet twenty," said Savage, who was holding three queens.

"Call the bet and raise fifty," the dealer countered, tossing in his chips.

Savage called the raise and asked for two cards. The dealer took three. The third one came from the bottom of the deck.

Savage did not touch the two cards he had been dealt, merely kept his hands on the green felt of the table and stared steadily at the dealer. The Mexican, an alert man, eased away from the table.

When the dealer saw Savage was not picking up his cards, he raised his eyebrows innocently. "Something wrong?"

"You dragged that last card off the bottom," Savage said evenly.

The dealer put his own cards down and smiled tightly. "How's that again?"

IMMEDIATELY AFTER SAVAGE FIRED, HE FELT A GUN BARREL AGAINST HIS LOWER BACK. "JUST LET IT DOWN, MISTER," A VOICE ORDERED.

"You heard me," Savage said. "You're a cheat."

Eyes fixed unblinkingly on each other, both Savage and the dealer slowly pushed their chairs back and stood up. The army captain did the same and backed away.

"I don't like to be called a cheat," the dealer said coldly.

"Better quit cheating then," Savage replied flatly. "Or get better at it."

The dealer's face darkened and he reached quickly under his frock coat. In a swift, fluid movement, Savage drew his pistol and fired once. The dealer spun around, doubled over, and sprawled facedown across a roulette table behind him.

Immediately after Savage fired, he felt a gun barrel against his lower back. "Just let it down, mister," a voice ordered. Savage was staring at his gun. It had barely bucked in his hand when he had fired it, almost as if he'd fired a defective cartridge. Before he could wonder about it anymore, Charley Bender walked over from the bar and took the gun from Savage's hand. Bender's other deputy bent over the man sprawled on the roulette table.

"He's dead, Sheriff," the deputy said after a moment. "He's also unarmed."

Curt Savage's face registered shock. *"Unarmed?* The man reached for a gun!"

"The man reached under his coat," Bender corrected. "Maybe he wanted to get a handkerchief to blow his nose." Pulling Savage's hands together, Bender put cuffs on him. "Take him to jail," he told the deputy with the gun in Savage's back.

"Wait a minute! I didn't know he was unarmed," Savage protested.

"Next time, ask," Bender said. He turned to his other deputy. "Let's get this man over to the undertaker."

When Savage awoke in his jail cell the next morning, he found Senator Landman, Mayor Temple, and Mayor Sanchez looking at him through the bars.

"Looks like you got yourself into a little trouble, young man," the senator said.

Savage did not respond. Silently he studied the men.

"Shooting down an unarmed man is a serious offense," said Mayor Temple.

"A hanging offense," added Mayor Sanchez.

Rising from his cot, Savage stood at the bars. "I thought the man was reaching for a gun," he said evenly. And, although he didn't say so, he was still wondering whether he'd shot the man with a defective cartridge.

"It doesn't matter what you thought," Landman said. "Pity you didn't take the job we offered you last night. You'd be on a train for Mexico City now instead of in jail."

"What do you want, Senator?" asked Savage.

"I want to repeat the offer of last night—and help you get out of here."

"I'm going to be charged with murder. How can you help me with that?"

"The man you killed," said the El Paso mayor, "was a tinhorn gambler who drifted into town a few days ago. He's got no family that we know of; no friends in town. If we take him out and quietly bury him tomorrow, nobody'll pay much attention to it. And if Sheriff Bender tears up your arrest record, well—"

"The incident never happened," the senator said. "Give us a week's work and you'll be back on your way to the Panama Canal, free and clear. *And*—we'll still pay you the five thousand."

Savage continued to study the men. He did not like them, especially Landman. The senator was a little too slick for his taste. And the other two were obviously his lackeys.

But they had him—and they knew it.

"Well?" Landman prompted.

"Anything's better than hanging," Savage said. "I'll take it."

An hour later Savage, the three politicians, and Sheriff Bender walked down Bowie Street and crossed the short stone bridge that connected El Paso to Juarez. They passed the U.S. border guards with a nod from Landman, and the Mexicans with a similar nod from Sanchez. The five of them continued down Avenida Colón to the El Grande Hotel. The street was teeming with revolutionary soldiers, and the hotel entrance and its high-ceilinged, ornate lobby was heavily guarded, but with Sanchez leading the way, the group of *gringos* proceeded unchallenged.

"There's just one thing preventing us from moving," General Villa said. "General Zapata's army is almost out of ammunition."

Entering a second-floor suite, the men were met by a moon-faced, mustachioed man with narrow, slitted eyes. He was wearing khaki army breeches and *charro* leggings, a spotless white shirt, and a holstered, pearl-handled pistol on a full cartridge belt.

"Señor Savage," said Mayor Sanchez, "I have the honor to introduce General Francisco Villa, *comandante* of the Revolutionary Army of the North."

Villa nodded curtly but did not offer to shake hands. "Have you told him his job?" he asked Landman.

"Only in broad terms, General. We wanted him to hear the specifics from you."

Villa motioned Savage over to a large table, on which was spread a contour map of Mexico. "Here, *señor,"* he placed a finger on the map, "is Juarez. Camped in and around the city is one-half of the Mexican Revolutionary Army, under my command." His finger moved south. "Mexico City, the national capital. Presently in the hands of General Victoriano Huerta, who had President Madero executed and seized the government. Huerta has the entire federal army at his disposal and is determined to control the entire country." Now Villa's finger moved east. "Veracruz. The seaport and the area around it are held by the other half of our forces, the Revolutionary Army of the South, under the command of General Emiliano Zapata." Villa strode away from the map and began to pace. "I am ready to move from the north, Zapata from the south and east. Our plan is to come at the city from three sides, drive Huerta and the *federales* from the capital, and restore a people's president once again—as we did when we overthrew the dictator Porfirio Díaz and put Madero in his place. There's just one thing preventing us from moving." He stopped and looked at Savage. "General Zapata's army is almost out of ammunition."

"That'll do it, all right," Savage said, nodding.

"However," Villa continued, "a German cargo ship, loaded not only with ammunition but also with newer guns and explosives, is at sea at this moment, bound for Veracruz. It is scheduled to dock there in one week."

"Sounds like your problem is solved then," Savage said.

"Not entirely, *señor,"* said Villa. "Payment for the cargo has to be made on delivery. And General Zapata has no money. But," he stepped to a nearby desk and from a large envelope removed an impressive-looking document, "this is a certified, negotiable letter of credit for one million *pesos* in gold, payable through the Bank of Havana, in Cuba. It is money raised by *peons* all over Mexico to support the revolution."

Curt Savage nodded wryly as all the pieces of the picture fell into place for the first time. "You want me to go through the Mexican federal army lines and deliver the letter of credit to Zapata, is that it?"

"Exactly."

Looking back down at the map, Savage frowned deeply. "What makes you think it can be done?"

Senator Landman spoke up. "It's all planned out for you, my boy." He strode over to a door, opened it, and said, smiling, "Come in, please, my dear."

An attractive American woman entered the room. She had dark, wine-red hair and wore a fashionable day dress of light green linen.

"May I present Miss Caroline York," the senator said to Savage. "She is being paid to travel with you. As your wife."

"Now, wait a minute—" Savage balked.

"Hear me out," Landman insisted. "The two of you will leave Juarez on the train for Mexico City. The train still operates between the territories controlled by the two factions, because it is in both their interests to allow it to do so. We've booked a private railroad car for you. You will pose as newly married, wealthy Americans on your honeymoon. It's a perfect ploy. In Mexico City you'll stay in the bridal suite of the Majestic Hotel. The day after you arrive, you will hire horses and go riding outside the city. You," he fixed his eyes on Savage, "will keep riding, toward Veracruz. Caroline will return to the city and say you've been taken by bandits. She will insist on returning to El Paso at once to secure money for your ransom. The *federales* won't send troops out because they'll be fearful of endangering the safety of a kidnapped, wealthy American. It's a perfect plan."

"I don't know," Savage said du-

"Unless you use the train for the major part of your journey," General Villa said, "you will never make it in time."

biously. "What if the federal authorities don't believe her story?"

"They will," said Caroline York, speaking for the first time. "You see, Mr. Savage, I'm a professional actress. I was recently part of a touring company that played at the American Theater in Mexico City. I met a number of high-ranking Mexican officials while I was there and—well, frankly, some of them were quite taken with me. I'll be able to convince them, I assure you."

"You'll have to *keep* them convinced, too," Savage pointed out. "It'll take two full days for me to get to the coast—"

"You won't have to worry about *federales* after the first day," Villa interjected. "I received word last night that Zapata's forces have moved inland as far as Chocomán. Once you get that far, you'll be given safe escort."

Savage shook his head reluctantly. "Why can't you just give me a pair of good saddle horses and some supplies, and let me make my way to Matamoros, then down the coast to Tampico—"

"Not enough time," Villa said. "The German ship will reach Veracruz in one week. It has orders to remain only twenty-four hours, then return to sea. Unless you use the train for the major part of your journey, you will never make it in time."

"Mr. Savage," said Caroline York, "if you're afraid I'll slow you down, don't be. I'm a good enough actress and a fast enough talker to probably get us out of any trouble we get into. And if I can't, well, I still won't hold you up. I can ride a horse as well as most men, and—" she quickly drew a derringer from the sleeve of her dress "—shoot better than most."

"Miss York," Savage said with mock solemnity, "will you marry me?"

The next day, after a staged wedding ceremony in the Juarez Cathedral, Curt Savage and Caroline York, dressed as bride and groom, were accompanied to their private railroad coach by Mayor Sanchez. He gave Savage the letter of credit, and Savage put it in a money belt under his shirt.

"You are about to undertake a great service for Mexico, *señor*," the official said. "If you are successful in this journey, you will become a great patriot of the revolution. I wish you Godspeed."

"Thanks," Savage said. "I just hope I live long enough to collect the five thousand."

Sanchez debarked and stood on the platform with Senator Landman and Mayor Temple to wave good-bye as the train slowly pulled out of the station. When it was out of sight down the track, Sheriff Bender came out of the depot with a man in a black frock coat and a string tie—the man Savage thought he had killed in the saloon.

"Ah, Mr. Woodson," said Landman. He handed him an envelope. "Excellent performance; thank you. The blank cartridges worked perfectly."

Bert Woodson, the actor who had played with Caroline York in *The Death of Jesse James,* smiled. "They're special blanks; they have wadding in them to give the gun a realistic recoil when it's fired onstage. Caroline have any trouble convincing your man to let her go?"

"None at all. She'll do just fine. Gentlemen," he included the others, "I'd like to buy everyone a drink."

They all accepted except Mayor Temple. "I've got to get back to running my town," he said, starting toward the International Bridge.

As Landman and the others headed for a cantina, Mal Temple crossed back into El Paso and walked down Bowie Street to his office.

"Elmo and his friends are here," Temple's secretary said as he entered.

"All right, Mae. See that we aren't disturbed." He went into his private office to find four hard-looking, prairie-dressed, heavily armed young cowboys. One of them, who had a wide space between his top front teeth, greeted him warmly.

"Hey, Uncle Mal!"

"How's my favorite nephew?" Temple threw an arm around the youth's shoulders.

"Uncle Mal, these here are my boys: Rimbo, Curly, and Chester."

Temple poured them all drinks, then spread out his own map of Mexico.

"The route of the train takes it straight down through Chihuahua and Durango. There's a three-hour stop in each place. You boys can easily ride past it to Bocacho, where it has to make a slow climb

Curly swung up into the engine and covered the fireman and his assistant with a gun. "Just hold still, amigos," he ordered.

through a mountain pass. I figure the place to stop it is just around the curve at the top of that pass. Savage and the woman are in the last car before the caboose. He's carrying the letter of credit in a money belt; I watched through the window from the platform when Sanchez gave it to him."

"You want us to kill the woman, too?" Elmo asked.

Mayor Temple shrugged. "Might as well."

That evening, as the train chugged along the barren northern Mexico desert, Savage, in his shirtsleeves, and Caroline, in a lacy peignoir, were at a table by the window, sipping whiskey and playing cards.

"That sure is a comfortable looking bed over there," Savage remarked idly. "Nice and big."

"It's for honeymooners," Caroline said. "I hear they root around a lot."

"Think we'll do that on our honeymoon?" Savage asked innocently. "Root around a lot?"

Caroline reached for her purse and put the derringer on the table. "This is a business proposition, mister. Keep that in mind."

"Whatever you say, lady." Savage raised his hands in mock surrender. "It's a long trip to Mexico City. I just thought—"

"I *know* what you thought."

Savage shrugged and passed her the deck. "Your deal, dear."

That night, Caroline slept in the big, comfortable bed with its curtains drawn, while Savage scrunched up on a velvet chaise that was a foot too short for his lanky frame.

"Some honeymoon," he muttered several times.

"Stop complaining," Caroline finally said from her cloistered corner.

"I want a divorce."

"Shut up and go to sleep."

He finally did.

In the morning, after two long stops during the night at Chihuahua and Durango, the train started up a steep grade, gradually leaving the floor of the desert below and straining its way up past patches of unmelted spring snow. In the engine, the fireman and his assistant kept up a steady rhythm of coal shoveling to feed the blazing steam generator. The engineer watched the grade carefully, sometimes slowing the train to a mere crawl, until it had safely reached the summit and began rounding the curve that crested the pass. It was then, partway around the curve, that he saw the track ahead blocked by a fallen tree. Gradually, he slowed to a stop. All of the train was over the crest except the caboose and the private car in front of it.

"Get the brakeman from the caboose," the engineer said to the two firemen, "and move the tree away."

Just then, one of Elmo Temple's cowboys, Curly, swung up into the engine and covered them with a gun. "Just hold still, *amigos*," he ordered. Glancing back out, he saw one of his companions, Chester, on a knoll next to the train, moving a double-barreled shotgun in a slow arc to keep the Mexican passengers from interfering.

At the rear of the train, Elmo and the third member of his gang, Rimbo, burst into the private car and threw down on Savage and Caroline.

"Morning, folks," Elmo said with his gap-toothed smile. "Sorry to break in on your honeymoon like this. Mr. Savage, pull your shirt up and take off the money belt you're wearing." His eyes shifted over and studied Caroline, still in her nightclothes, having morning coffee. "Get dressed, honey—you're taking a little side trip with me and the boys."

Rimbo covered Savage as he unbuckled the money belt, but Elmo was paying lustful attention to Caroline as she rose and reached for her dress. As she picked it up, she also picked up the derringer lying under it, turned, and calmly shot Elmo in the gut.

Rimbo whirled at the sound of the shot, and Savage used the money belt to whip the gun from his hand. Savage jumped him and they fell to the floor, struggling.

Outside, Chester heard the shot, and when Elmo and Rimbo did not come out, he moved along the knoll to the back of the train. "Elmo, ever'thing all right?" he yelled. Getting no answer, Chester stepped onto the platform and looked inside the private car. Elmo was sitting on the floor, gutshot. Rimbo was wrestling with Savage, and Caroline was holding the derringer, trying to get a shot at Rimbo. Chester stepped inside,

SAVAGE GRABBED THE TOP OF THE PLATFORM AND SWUNG BOTH FEET UP TO SLAM INTO RIMBO'S CHEST. RIMBO PLUNGED BACKWARDS.

snatched the little pistol from Caroline's hand, and punched her viciously in the face. As Caroline dropped, Chester moved toward the fighting men, raising the shotgun to buttstroke Savage.

Moaning from the blow to her face, Caroline reached across the floor and got the wounded Elmo's gun. Pushing up on one elbow, she shot Chester in the back.

Savage and Rimbo fought each other out onto the platform connecting the caboose. One side of the train was precipitously close to the edge of the grade and for a moment, both men hung perilously over the gate. Then Savage pushed Rimbo back, and the young cowboy took the opportunity to draw a knife from his belt. He rushed Savage with it, but Savage grabbed the top of the platform and swung both feet up to slam into Rimbo's chest. Rimbo plunged backwards off the train and over the side of the mountain.

Rushing back into the car, Savage just had time to locate his own Colt when Curly came bursting in. Curly took a split second to glance at the dead Chester, and in that instant Savage shot him twice in the heart.

Savage rushed to help Caroline off the floor. The left side of her face was already discolored and swelling, but she was still alert. Her eyes swept the car.

"Where's the other one?" she asked urgently. "The one I shot with my derringer?"

Savage's head swung around and he saw Elmo on the car's front platform, one hand clutching his stomach wound as he laboriously pulled up the pin that connected the two rear cars to the rest of the train. Through the door, Savage shot him twice, but Elmo managed to get the pin out anyway, before he fell dead. The private car and the caboose started rolling backwards down the grade, their combined weight snapping the air hose that also connected them to the train.

As the two cars began picking up speed, a terrified Mexican brakeman rushed wide-eyed onto the platform between the cars. Caroline, so resourceful up to then, now froze in fear and clung to Savage. Beneath them, as the track curved and twisted, the two cars jerked and pitched on their precarious way.

"Use the hand brake!" Savage yelled at the Mexican trainman.

"We go too fast, *señor*. It no work."

Savage could tell from gaps in the noise that on sharp curves the wheels were leaving the tracks, then slamming back down. "When the wheels are off the track, will the hand brake stop them then?" he shouted to the trainman.

"I don't know, *señor*."

"Come on!" Savage ordered.

Thrusting Caroline away, Savage climbed the outside ladder to the roof of the car, the trembling, reluctant trainman right behind him. The two men positioned themselves at the handbrake wheel.

"Wait for that curve up ahead!" Savage yelled.

The two cars rumbled around the curve. When they were halfway into their turn, they lurched sideways, all the wheels on one side lifting off the rail. Savage and the trainman turned the brake wheel as hard as they could. For a fraction of a second the wheels locked, but when they settled on the track again, they resumed their rapid rolling.

"Try it again on the next curve!" Savage yelled.

"That is the worst curve on the grade!" the Mexican yelled back. "We'll go over for certain."

"Try it!" Savage ordered.

The cars went into the next curve, a wide, looping turn almost on the edge of the grade. When wheels on both sides under the connecting platform buckled off the rails, the two men turned and held the brake wheel with all their strength. Below, the big steel brake shoes clamped the free wheels to an instant halt. When they settled back onto the track, they were in a locked position. An immediate shower of sparks shot out, causing some of the dry mountain brush to begin smoldering. But the middle wheels held, and the two orphan cars, after a noisy, dangerous moment of pitching and tilting and almost plunging over the side, finally ground to a screeching halt.

Savage and the Mexican slumped over the brake wheel, exhausted.

Below them, in the private car, Caroline York had fainted.

That night, Savage and Caroline nursed their injuries over a chicken *mole* dinner served from the kitchen car. The main section of the train had, earlier, backed

"We've been through a very bad time together, Savage," Caroline said. "We're both in pain and I think we need something besides the tequila."

carefully down the grade, reconnected its two lost cars, and resumed its journey. They were now out of the mountains, on the Zacatecas plains, in *federales* territory. Caroline's cheek was swollen and blue; Savage had half a dozen facial cuts and his palms were blistered from the brake wheel. They ate as best they could, and washed the food down with plenty of tequila. The car was dimly lit, and the rolling wheels sent up a steady, lulling rhythm. Caroline was melancholy.

"My daddy was a dirt-poor Indiana farmer," she said. "I went up to Chicago to learn to act. But of course when you're a hick, you have to learn a lot of other things first. But I finally got some breaks and started working in touring companies. I think I told you back in Juarez that our last tour was of the English language theaters in Central America and Mexico. In Mexico City, I met a Mexican army officer—Colonel Diego Zarco—and we fell in love. Because of his family, he couldn't propose marriage to a *gringa*. So I left and moved on with the touring company."

"Is that why you took the job?" Savage asked. "To go back and see him again?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Not that I really think it'll do any good." Sighing quietly, Caroline rested her head back and held up her glass. "Pour," she ordered.

Savage filled her glass, then rose and got a fresh ice pack in a towel for her face. Kneeling next to her chair, he held it gently in place for her. "You were really something today," he complimented. "Never in all my experience have I ever met a woman like you."

"There *are* no women like me," she said proudly.

"You saved my life today."

"And you saved mine." Caroline moved the hand with the ice pack away and they locked eyes, closely. "We've been through a very bad time together, Savage. We're both in pain and I think we need something besides the tequila."

Rising, Caroline took the derringer from her robe pocket and tossed it onto the couch. Then she dropped the robe itself to the floor.

The next afternoon the train pulled into the hectic, bustling terminal in Mexico City. As Savage and Caroline were preparing to leave the private car, Savage removed the letter of credit from the envelope in his money belt and folded it to fit under an inside flap of his right boot. Then he folded his map of Texas, put it in the envelope, and returned the envelope to his money belt.

"The men who stopped the train knew about my money belt," he said. "If we get waylaid again, I'll give it to them."

Leaving the train, they went by carriage to the stately Majestic Hotel, across the main plaza from the National Palace. Within an hour after being quartered in the luxurious bridal suite, there was a knock at the door. Savage opened it to find a darkly handsome Mexican colonel in full dress uniform, complete with sword, accompanied by four soldiers.

"Colonel Diego Zarco, *señor*," he introduced himself, "at your service."

Caroline came to the door. "Hello, Diego," she quietly greeted her former lover. She introduced Savage as her husband.

"Forgive the intrusion," Zarco said gallantly, "but I would never forgive myself if I let you visit our city again without personally welcoming you." He looked at Savage. "You are indeed a fortunate man, *señor*, to have won the hand of such a beautiful woman. As it so happens, today is the day our *presidente* holds a weekly dinner for foreign embassy officials and distinguished visitors to the capital. It would be my honor if you and your bride would attend and allow me the privilege of introducing you to our great leader."

"We're very tired from the trip," Savage said. "Maybe next week—"

"Ah, but I am afraid this will be the last dinner for a while," Zarco countered. "In a few days, the *presidente* takes the field against the bandit Zapata and his rebels." Zarco's eyes narrowed slightly. "Have you heard of this Zapata, *señor?*"

"On occasion," Savage admitted.

"A despicable traitor to Mexico," Zarco accused. "Our *presidente*, who was formerly a general in the federal army, is going to personally lead the troops who will end his reign of lawlessness." He turned to Caroline again. "My dear, use your irresistible charms

As Indian servers brought trays of food, Savage felt one of the women touch his arm under concealment of a tray.

on your bridegroom and convince him that it would be diplomatically impolite to refuse to meet the *presidente."*

"Curt, I think we should go," Caroline said.

Savage studied Zarco for a moment, looked out the door at the four armed soldiers, and nodded. "We'll be honored to attend, Colonel."

Zarco bowed. "I will leave the escort here," he indicated the soldiers, "and have a military carriage downstairs for you at eight. Until tonight."

After kissing Caroline's hand, he withdrew.

That evening, Savage and Caroline were escorted through a gate in the National Palace to a lovely garden courtyard where an extravagant dinner was under way. It was attended by a variety of civilian and military attachés and their wives, from the capital's numerous foreign diplomatic missions. They sat at tables for six spread around the garden, enjoying food brought to them by Indian women in white blouses and floor-length skirts, while a band played quietly in one corner.

Savage and Caroline were seated at a table directly facing the table of the Mexican president, Victoriano Huerta, a large, square-faced, completely bald man with a Fu Manchu mustache and very thick-lensed glasses. At the table with him were his own generals and cabinet members.

As the Indian servers began bringing trays of foods from which Savage and Caroline could select, Savage felt one of the women touch his arm under concealment of a tray. As he looked up at her, she met his eyes briefly and thrust something into his hand—a small scrap of paper.

Savage's expression did not change, but he watched the woman as she moved around the circular table. A dark, high-cheekboned, wide-lipped, yet somehow pretty woman, she did not look back at him again. When she left the garden area to return to the kitchen, Savage casually and surreptitiously opened his hand and saw printed in English on the scrap of paper a single word: DANGER.

At that moment, Colonel Zarco came forward and stood before Huerta's table. *"Mi presidente, con permiso,"* he said, saluting. "I would like to present two visitors from the United States. They have just arrived from El Paso." Savage and Caroline rose as Zarco introduced them. Huerta acknowledged the introductions, gestured for Caroline to sit down again, but left Savage standing.

"Tell me, *señor,"* said the president, "how does it look in the north with Pancho Villa's so-called army?"

Savage, his stomach now knotted in apprehension, kept his voice as even as possible and replied, "I'm sure Your Excellency has much better intelligence reports on that question than I can provide."

"I do, naturally," Huerta said, smiling. "In fact, I have a very interesting report that Villa and Zapata plan to march simultaneously on this city as soon as Zapata receives one million pesos in gold to purchase arms being brought to Veracruz on a German ship. Would you by any chance know anything of such a transfer of gold, *Señor* Savage?"

Savage returned Huerta's smile. "Being on my honeymoon, Your Excellency, I'm afraid my mind has been on matters other than gold."

The men in the group laughed appreciatively and raised their glasses in acknowledgment of Caroline's obvious charms. But as soon as the laughter subsided, Zarco spoke.

"Perhaps *Señor* Savage's lovely bride might have some information. Tell us, *Señora,* do you know anything about Zapata's gold?"

Caroline smiled radiantly. "Yes, I do, Colonel. The gold is in the form of a negotiable letter of credit. It is hidden in Mr. Savage's right boot."

Savage looked incredulously at Caroline for a split second before reaching under his coat for a small pistol he carried in a shoulder holster. That split second was all the time Zarco needed to put his sword point at Savage's throat. At a gesture from Zarco, soldiers hurried forward to disarm him and take the letter of credit from his boot.

Caroline turned away and refused to meet Savage's eyes as he was taken from the garden.

At midnight, in a dungeon cell beneath the palace, Savage heard heavy footsteps and presently his cell was unlocked and opened.

"I HAVE A HORSE FOR YOU ON THE STREET BEHIND THE PALACE," THE WOMAN WHISPERED. "FIRST, THE GUARD MUST BE KILLED."

Zarco strode in with his usual four soldiers.

"I want information from you, *gringo*," he said without preliminary. "I want to know the size of Zapata's force. Where he and Villa plan to join up. What foreign governments besides Germany are supporting the revolution—"

"I don't know any of that," Savage interrupted him flatly. "I'm a courier, Zarco. Hasn't my *wife* told you that?"

At a nod from Zarco, the soldiers forcibly stripped Savage to the waist and sat him on the floor with his wrists lashed to his ankles.

"Shall I begin, sir?" one of the soldiers asked, holding a heavy, studded bridle.

"No, I want the pleasure of this myself," Zarco said.

Removing his hat, belt, and uniform coat, Zarco took the bridle and whipped Savage's back until he broke flesh. Savage bit his bottom lip bloody to keep from screaming. Zarco ceased the lashing after drawing blood.

"That is enough for the present, *gringo*," he said. "I go now to partake of other pleasures—with your *bride*. In the morning I will return, and if you do not give me the information I want, I will cripple you."

Savage was untied and let fall over as the soldiers left and locked his cell.

By 3:00 A.M., Savage had pulled himself onto the cell's cot and managed to get his shirt draped around his back. He was awake when he heard voices in the dungeon corridor.

"Who are you, woman?"

"I am Maya Parral, from the kitchen."

"What do you want down here?"

"Colonel Zarco wants the *gringo* prisoner's back cleaned up and salved so he will not become infected and feverish before the next questioning."

"What do you have on that tray?"

"Clean water, some cloths, and ointment."

Savage heard the cell being unlocked, then the guard said, "Be quick, woman."

The woman who knelt next to Savage was the same one who had passed the scrap of paper to him at the dinner.

"I have a horse for you on the street behind the palace," she whispered. "First the guard must be killed—"

Savage sat up and let her clean his back. "Where are the quarters of Colonel Zarco?" he whispered back.

"You have no time for that," she said. "Do not think about the lashing he gave you—"

"I'm thinking about the letter they took from me. I have to get it back. He'll know where it is. Do you have a gun?"

"No, but I have this." From the folds of her long skirt, Maya drew a *machete*. Stepping to the open door, she called in Spanish, "Guard, can you come here, please?"

"What is it, woman?" the guard grumbled impatiently, ambling in.

As he stepped into the cell, Maya split his skull from behind with a single axlike blow.

Savage was on his feet at once, taking the guard's gun and having Maya help him back into his shirt and coat. "Show me where Zarco is," he said then.

Savage followed the woman back up stairways and down dimly lit service halls, avoiding the roving sentries on duty. Presently, on the second floor, they came to a door with a hand-lettered card in a brass holder which read: COLONEL DIEGO ZARCO, PRESIDENTIAL STAFF.

"The doors in the palace are never locked," Maya whispered, "in case guards or servants are summoned."

Savage and Maya silently let themselves in. The shadowy room they entered was a combination office and parlor, a small lamp lit on the desk, faltering embers in the fireplace. Through an open door was Zarco's bedroom. The lights were on. Caroline was sitting up in bed, brushing her hair. Zarco, bare to the waist, sat in a nearby chair, sipping brandy and examining the letter of credit taken from Savage.

"A million gold pesos," he said thoughtfully. "Ah, to be a dishonorable man. Life would be so simple. Instead of proceeding south by escorted coach tomorrow to deposit this in the Bank of Guatemala for *el presidente*, I could get on my horse right now, ride west to Tecomán, board a freighter, and sail for Ecuador or Peru or even Chile. On this letter, I could live like a prince."

SAVAGE AND MAYA MADE THEIR WAY BY SERVICE CORRIDORS AND THROUGH A DESERTED KITCHEN TO THE REAR OF THE PALACE.

"Diego, let's do it," Caroline said excitedly. "Take me with you. Let's run away together!"

"No, I cannot abandon my honor," Zarco said. He smiled. "Not even for you and a million pesos."

"A wise choice," Savage said from the shadows. "She's not exactly trustworthy, Colonel!" He cocked the guard's pistol. "I'll take back that letter now." Savage stepped from the shadows, hand out. Zarco handed him the letter and Savage pushed it into the top of his boot. "Keep an eye on her," he said to Maya, nodding toward Caroline. Maya, with her machete, moved next to the bed. Caroline looked ill. "That was quite a whipping you gave me," Savage said to Zarco.

"And now you want to repay me for it, eh?" the colonel smiled. "You can't shoot me—the noise would alert the guards. It's a shame you're not a gentleman, *señor*. Then you could seek your satisfaction honorably, with sabers."

Savage smiled coldly. "There was a French swordmaster in my company during the Boer War. He gave me a few lessons." Handing the cocked pistol to Maya, he stepped over to a wall where two sabers hung crossed at their blades. He removed them and tossed one to Zarco.

"This is splendid!" Zarco said in delight.

The two men touched blade points and began. They fought slowly at first, each getting the feel of the other's pace and thrust. Both were highly skilled, both confident: Zarco smilingly so, Savage more seriously. They fought nimbly around chairs and other furniture, first one on the offensive, then the other. At one point they fought into the other room, locked blades at the hilt, and tumbled to the floor next to the fireplace. Zarco, on top, tried to force Savage's face into the hot embers; Savage's cheek came close enough that he smelled his own flesh begin to singe. He managed to force the Mexican back off him and they struggled to their feet. Holding his burned cheek, Savage stumbled back against Zarco's desk. Zarco, sensing a moment of vulnerability, rushed in for the kill. When he was close enough, Savage whirled and swung the saber in a horizontal arc, cutting halfway through Diego Zarco's neck.

Savage stood by while Maya used strips of bed linen to tie Caroline to a chair.

"Curt, don't leave me here," Caroline pleaded. "They'll blame me for this. They'll put me in front of a firing squad!"

"When you lie down with dogs," Savage replied coldly, "you get fleas."

He had Maya gag Caroline, then the two of them again made their way by service corridors and through a deserted kitchen to the rear of the palace where, at a market gate, farmers were already waiting to sell their produce.

Maya had only one horse waiting. "You've got to come, too," Savage said.

"Two on one horse will slow you down," she shook her head. "I can hide in the city."

But Savage refused to leave her. "We'll get another horse." He swung her up onto the mount behind him.

At a cantina near the guard barracks, they found three cavalry horses tethered at a rail. Savage unhitched one and got into its saddle, then, with a slash of Maya's machete, cut the reins of the other two. Giving a loud rebel yell, he frightened off the two freed animals, then he and Maya rode swiftly away in the darkness.

As they escaped, Savage could not help hoping that somehow Caroline could talk her way out of the firing squad.

At noon the next day, riding slowly to rest the horses, moving through the hills of Puebla, Maya Parral told Savage how she had come to be involved in the revolution.

"My father and two brothers were both *Zapatistas*. Back in the early days, when General Zapata was beginning to build his army, they were among the first to join. We had a little farm in Morelos, not far from where the Zapata family lived. The *haciendados* took our farm when they took many others. So when the Zapata brothers rode into the hills to fight back, my father and my two brothers followed him. The *federales* took my mother and some of the other women from the village and put them in prison in Mexico City. The government said they would be held there until the men surrendered. The Zapata brothers

"Do not move or I will kill you both!" a harsh voice ordered from above and behind Savage and Maya Parral.

were ready to bring their followers in and surrender, but then one of the women killed herself after a *federale* guard raped her. After that, there was never again any thought of surrender."

Maya spoke sadly, head lowered, holding the reins loosely as her mount found its own way along the winding trail. Riding beside her, Savage's face was solemn. The atrocities of war were not new to him, but he nevertheless felt compassion for Maya Parral.

"Were you one of the women put in prison?" he asked. She shook her head.

"No. I went to Mexico City to be near the prison. Sometimes I was able to bribe the guards and get a little extra food to my mother. But she was not a healthy woman and the damp dungeon cells finally gave her consumption; she did not survive. And before I could return to Morelos, word reached me that my father and both my brothers had been killed in a big battle between the *federales* and the *Zapatistas*. After that, I had no one."

She raised her head now and her cheeks were tearstained. But her expression was set and her dark eyes reflected fierce determination.

"I wanted to do something—find some way to fight back. So I managed to get a job at the palace. There I listened, and I remembered everything I heard. Each Saturday when I left the palace to go to confession, I passed all of the information to one of the priests, and he saw that it got to General Zapata's staff."

They reached the crest of a hill and looked down on a distant town.

"Chocomán," Maya said. "The *Zapatistas* hold the town. Once we reach there, we will be safe."

They began to work their way down out of the hills.

"You must have been a very good contact for Zapata when you were in the palace," said Savage. "I'm sorry I ruined that for you."

"No matter," Maya replied. "I will find another way to help our cause. General Zapata is the greatest man our country has seen since Benito Juarez. In time, we will be victorious."

"Wait," Savage said suddenly, touching the hand with which Maya held the reins, halting both horses. "Look."

Just beyond a blind curve ahead of them a saddled but riderless horse, its reins down, stood idly on the trail. Savage's eyes narrowed and swept the surrounding terrain, but he saw no one. Cautiously he led the way up to the horse.

"Maybe someone was thrown, farther up the trail," Maya said tentatively, as Savage moved his hand to the guard's gun in his belt.

"Do not move, or I will kill you both!" a harsh voice ordered from above and behind them.

Savage and Maya froze.

"Drop your gun to the ground, *señor,*" the voice ordered. Savage obeyed. "Now, both of you dismount—very slowly, *por favor.* Back away from your horses." When they had done so, the voice said, "Now you may turn around."

Savage and Maya slowly turned to see a man with a rifle standing on a boulder a dozen feet above them. Maya had never seen the man before, but Savage had. He grunted in quiet irony. It was Eloy Sanchez, the mayor of Juarez.

"Nice to see you again, *Señor* Savage." Carefully he made his way down off the boulder. "Surprised?"

"Sure am," Savage admitted. "How'd you get here so fast?"

"Simple. I took the same train the next morning. In Mexico City I bought this nice horse and rode out on the only trail leading to Veracruz. I have been camped here all night, waiting for you. Now, would you be good enough to hand over your money belt?"

"Why don't you just take it after you kill us?"

"I have no desire to kill you," Sanchez said. "For your information, there is a company of *federales* camped just half a mile from here. And there are *Zapatistas* in Chocomán, in front of us. Rifle shots might attract patrols from either. Of course, I *will* kill you if I have to. But I would much rather have you simply drop the money belt on the ground, mount up, and ride away. Then I will take my chances in the hills alone."

Savage sighed quietly to make Sanchez think he knew he was beaten. "Let the girl ride away first and it's a deal. I want to be sure she's safe in case you change your mind about the rifle shots."

"Agreed," said Sanchez.

Savage guided Maya to her horse and coaxed her to mount.

When Savage regained consciousness, he found himself on a hospital cot, clean bandages on his leg and face.

"Ride like hell to Chocomán," he whispered. "I'll be okay."

Maya slapped her horse to a trot down the trail. Savage turned back, unbuckled the money belt, which was stained with dried blood from his whipping, and tossed it onto the ground.

"What about my five thousand?" he asked, still acting, stalling for time.

"Please, *señor,*" Sanchez said indignantly. "You did not complete your assignment. Leave now, and give thanks to still be alive." He gestured toward Savage's horse with his rifle. *"Vaya con Dios."*

Savage mounted and started walking his horse slowly down the trail. Behind him, he heard the clink-clink of Sanchez's spurs as he walked over to get the money belt. Heeling the horse into a faster walk, Savage glanced back and saw Sanchez pick up the money belt and open its pocket. The Mexican's face collapsed in surprise when he found only Savage's folded map of Texas.

Savage now kicked his mount into a quick gallop. He barely rounded a bend in the downward trail as Sanchez's first rifle shot ricocheted off the side of the rocky hill, missing him only by inches. As Savage continued to rush his horse downhill, Sanchez quickly climbed back to the top of the boulder. From there he had an open field along the trail Savage was racing down. Raising the rifle, he took careful aim and fired again.

The shot struck Savage's horse, sending both rider and animal pitching forward in a great cloud of dust. As he hit the ground, Savage heard from somewhere behind him the sound of a bugle. Sanchez, he knew, would be waiting for the dust to clear, ready to take another shot. Scrambling to his knees, dazed, Savage searched for cover of some kind. But the dust cleared before he could find any, and from the boulder came the shot that Savage feared. The slug tore into his left leg, throwing him forward on the ground.

Sanchez, too, had heard the bugle, and from his higher vantage point saw what it represented: the company of federal cavalry that had been camped nearby. It was riding rapidly toward them from behind. Cursing his luck, Sanchez abandoned the boulder, leaped onto his horse, and galloped toward the fallen Savage. In two minutes he had reached him. Jumping down, he stood over Savage and cocked his rifle again.

"You are not an honorable man to deal with, *señor,*" he accused.

"That's what your mother told your father, you bastard," Savage said evenly, and looked away, waiting for the bullet.

When the next shot was fired, it hit Eloy Sanchez, not Savage, drilling into the side of the Mexican's head and dropping him like a wet rope. Savage's head whirled around just as Maya galloped up and reined in her horse. In one hand she held a derringer.

"I took it from the beautiful *gringa* woman," she said.

Looking at her, his face whitening as he lost blood from his leg, Savage replied, "That woman is not beautiful, Maya. You are the beautiful one."

Coming down the trail behind them now was the charging company of federal cavalry troops, their bugle once again blaring. Hurrying to the dead Sanchez, Maya retrieved his rifle and drew his pistol from its holster. Kneeling beside Savage, she gave him Sanchez's pistol and the derringer. She herself readied the rifle.

"Think we can whip them?" Savage asked weakly.

"Of course," Maya replied, gently touching his burned and now lacerated face. "There are two of us and only about two dozen of them. How can we lose?"

Smiling slightly, Savage fainted.

He passed out just before another bugle sounded—this one from the direction of Chocomán. From the town came a swarm of white-uniformed *Zapatistas* that surged forward, the riders yelling and brandishing rifles and machetes.

In the face of that wave of threatening white, the *federales* wisely turned and retreated.

When Savage regained consciousness, he found himself on a hospital cot, clean bandages on his leg and face. Rising shakily on one elbow, he saw five other cots in the room, two of them occupied by wounded *Zapatistas*. Through an open window next to his bed, he heard the muted sounds of labor: heavy crates dropping, men shouting, wagon wheels crunching on cobblestone.

Tottering a little, Savage got

out of bed and stood by the window. He looked out at a busy waterfront along the Gulf of Mexico. Veracruz, he thought. A beehive of activity was centered around a docked cargo ship flying the Imperial German flag. The ship was being unloaded of crated guns and ammunition by white-garbed *Zapatistas*.

"I am glad you are awake to see what you have done for us," a voice said behind Savage.

He turned to face a man with deep, sad eyes, a full, drooping mustache, and a set, determined line of mouth. Wearing the simple white cotton of the Indian *peon,* he could have passed for the farmer he had once been, except for the bandoliers across his chest and the pistol and sword at his waist. Extending his hand, he said simply, "Emiliano Zapata."

"I'm honored, General," said Savage, shaking hands.

Zapata stepped up next to him at the window. "With the arms being unloaded out there, my army will march on Mexico City and join with General Villa's army to again retake our country for the people. Without you, we might not have done it."

Suddenly feeling weak, Savage sat back down on his bed. "How did I get to Veracruz?" he asked.

"In a wagon." Zapata smiled. "Accompanied by a very pretty young woman who I am told held your head in her lap all the way."

"Where is she now?"

"She has joined my *soldaderas* —the women who follow my soldiers and tend to their needs. As soon as the ship is unloaded, we begin our march to Mexico City. If you are strong enough, it would be an honor to have you fight beside me."

Savage shook his head. "I've had enough of war, General. I'm tired of fighting."

Zapata smiled sadly. "I, too, am tired of fighting, *amigo.* If I were in a country that was not my own, perhaps I would not fight either." From inside his shirt, he took a pouch of coins and handed them to Savage. "Five thousand American dollars in gold, as agreed. With it you also have the thanks of my people for what you have done for our country. *Adios.*"

Later, resting on his cot, Savage heard the noise of the street gradually subside and then stop altogether. Zapata's words reverberated in his mind: *She has joined my soldaderas.* Thinking of those words over and over, he suddenly made a decision.

Rising, a little unsteady but in control, Savage went to his clothes, which were hanging in a corner. Moments later, dressed, limping but managing, he walked out of the hospital, feeling incomplete without his gun belt, his rifle, his horse. But at the hospital's hitch rail he saw a magnificent black stallion, saddled and waiting, a leather gun belt and holstered Colt hanging from the saddle horn. An old man, dressed in *Zapatista* white, one sleeve empty, was guarding it. When he saw Savage, he held out the reins to him.

"A gift," the old man said simply, "from General Zapata."

Savage took a hundred-dollar coin from the pouch and gave it to the old man. *"Gracias,"* he said, and laboriously swung his wounded leg over the animal to mount. He trotted the horse down the now-deserted waterfront street and turned inland.

In a little while, Savage reached the outskirts of Veracruz and saw the last of a long column of white-clad marchers just beyond the city. Urging his horse forward, he caught up with them and rode along the moving line, searching for Maya. He passed wagons, carts, women carrying sacks and bundles on their backs, mules laden with cookstoves and pans, young girls with rolled blan-

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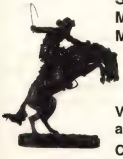

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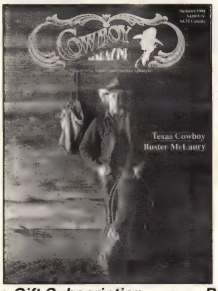

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kets under their arms and guitars slung on their shoulders. These were the camp followers of the Mexican Revolutionary Army.

Savage rode on, eyes darting, scanning the faces, until he finally located Maya Parral. Reining up, he dismounted with a grimace of pain and pulled her from the line. Her dark eyes flashed irritation.

"You should have stayed in the hospital," she scolded.

"I couldn't," Savage said. "I couldn't stay without you." He took one of her hands. "Come with me to Panama."

"No!" Maya said firmly, almost angrily. Then her eyes filled with tears and she repeated the word more softly. "No, I cannot. Not until I help finish what my family gave their lives for."

"Maya, you've given enough," he tried to reason. "Even Zapata would tell you so."

"No one can give enough," she said resolutely, "until we have won." She looked deeply into his eyes, her desire for him as obvious as his for her. But stronger than that was the duty she felt. "I must go," she said. With one hand she pulled Savage's head down and kissed him passionately on the lips. Then she stepped quickly back into the moving column and left him behind.

Forlorn, Savage mounted his horse again and walked it slowly back toward Veracruz. It isn't the end of the world, he told himself. He had almost five thousand in gold, a good job still waiting in Panama, and he was certain there would be plenty of desirable women down there who would be more than willing to tend to his needs.

But those women would not be Maya Parral, he answered himself. He would not find another like her.

With that thought, Savage reined his horse around and trotted it back along the line of *soldaderas*. When he reached Maya, he slowed just long enough for her to see him. Her eyes brightened when she looked up at him. They did not speak; they did not have to.

Savage rode at a gallop to the forward point of the long column, reined in beside Zapata, and slowed his horse to match the gait of Zapata's proud white stallion. Several times as he rode along next to the Mexican leader, he glanced at him, but Zapata did not return the look or even acknowledge Savage's presence. Finally Savage shook his head wryly and rode along, keeping his eyes straight ahead.

Beside him, Emiliano Zapata smiled.

OLD PETE

BY JANE CANDIA COLEMAN

The way I had it figured, my mule would go first so I could give him a decent burial and so he wouldn't grieve for me too hard. But Old Pete's going on thirty with no signs of dying, and they got me in this hospital bed, and they're a-running around making tests and prodding me like a calf that don't want to be rounded up nohow.

Pete and I have been together longer than most folks stay married these days. He was a two-year-old when I bought him, but young as he was, he had trail sense and savvy. The day I went to see him he looked me over just as sharp as I was looking at him, and he took a couple of sniffs at my hand so he'd know my smell. Then he stood while I mounted, one eye and one ear cocked sideways just watching me. He was the best riding mule I ever sat. He had an easy walk, a jog like running water, and a lope you couldn't get in your favorite rocking chair.

I bought him there and then, not knowing I'd bought a watchdog and a best friend for next to nothing.

So maybe it's better this way, me going first. I just won't come back, and after awhile I hope he'll stop looking for me, watching the road for the

Old Pete, he was something on a roundup. Knew what those dumb critters were going to do before they knew it themselves.

truck. He'll nose around Daisy the mare until it dawns on him I'm not coming back, and then maybe he'll lie down and dream about the way it used to be—the roundups, all those trails up in the mountains, all the things he and I have kept to ourselves for fear folks would come running to take a look and ruin it. And maybe he'll go out that way, easy and dreaming.

Used to be I could find places no one had ever seen, Pete making his own trail over the rocks and through the pines. There's a spot up there that has twenty-pound trout living underground. They're blind from being in the dark so long, and when they surface, right under the roots of an old juniper, you can pull 'em out barehanded.

Farther up there's a meadow where the ladybugs come every summer thick as locusts, breaking down branches and crawling everywhere, even up a man's pants and into his boots. That whole mountaintop is red with them, and the air's just a-buzzing with their little wings.

Old Pete always walked careful there, putting his feet down slow like he didn't want to disturb them. I don't know what they come for, whether it's to mate or to die, but they come, every summer for sure, and it's something to see.

These are things I keep to myself. In the last twenty years there's so many people come out here that nothing's the same. I don't resent them, but I sure don't need any more of them.

I wish the land could stay the way it was—open, empty, green. When I was a boy this whole place was green. There wasn't any rainy season or dry. We had rain twelve months a year, and the wash was full up and running unless it was froze in the winter.

We had grass then that was as high as a boy's head. Good grass that grew so thick you never walked on the dirt but on the stems and roots. And I could look out and see it bending and blowing and waving just like the sea. It was a sight. I can close my eyes and see it, see the cattle moving through, and the seed heads of the grass so heavy the stems bent down.

Old Pete, he was something on a roundup. Knew what those dumb critters were going to do before they knew it themselves. And he was surefooted. He never went around a mountain after a steer, or zigzagged down like a horse will do. He'd just sit on his rear and slide to the bottom, with me holding on for dear life. And he never got tired. He was as fresh at sunset as he was at first light. He knew how to take care of himself. A mule does.

I recollect one time when I was foreman on the Running W and working with a green kid—somebody's city relative who wanted to be a cowboy. A couple cows and their calves broke loose, and I had to go round them up and get them penned, so I told the kid to stay by the gate and wait, and help me drive 'em in when I came.

The first time Pete and I come down with the cows, the kid was nowhere to be seen. He'd gone off somewhere in the brush, thinking he was helping me look. The cows split up and took off, and I had to find the kid and give him a talking to. Told him to follow orders and stay put. Then Pete and I went off and rounded up the cows and brought them back again. Same thing. The kid wasn't there. He'd got bored and was settin' off a ways under a tree. I gave him what for, and got back on Pete, but Pete, he just planted his feet and wouldn't move. He just looked at me and at that kid and said, "No, sir!" I whupped him, spurred him even, but he'd had enough fooling around. He knew that kid was worthless, and he just quit.

And there's no man can make a mule change its mind once it's decided. I led him home and left him alone for a week, and then got on and rode him hard. No trouble. He'd just figured there was no point wasting any more time with a fool kid.

Well, seems like everything's changed. There's no big roundups now, and not much open range, neither. And the good grass is dried up and gone with the change in the weather. A steer's got to roam for its dinner and then get sent to a feedlot to fatten. And what's worse, we've got big business and the government and a bunch of playboys from the cities telling us what we can and can't do with our own land so all the freedom's gone out of life. Seems like a man can't even spit without somebody tellin' him, and that takes the pleasure out of it.

Used to be a man had good neighbors, folks he could depend

Sometimes I think the whole world's gone deaf and blind. Everybody fighting everybody else, and for what?

on even if he never saw them from one mother to the next. Nowadays that road outside my fence is filled with folks I never saw before and don't much care to see again. Folks who don't know how to get along with the land—don't know what it's for or how to take care of it or themselves.

Old Pete, though, he keeps them away. He watched that gate, and if someone he don't know or don't like gets close, he'll snort and holler and block the way, and he'll show those yellow teeth if they get ornery. Mules have long memories. Pete knows his friends though they might not come but once a year. He smells 'em all over like a dog and remembers in that old mule brain of his. He's got that mare to look out for, too. He loves that mare. He'd kill anyone laid a hand on her.

I've seen him shove her away from rattlers and test water before letting her drink. He's got a lot of words to tell me what's going on, too. The other day he found a rattler up against the house, and I could tell from the sounds he was making what he'd got. He'd stomped it before I could get there, but he was ready to talk about it to anyone who'd listen.

Like I say, he's a watchdog and a friend. I never had a better. He doesn't intrude but lets a man be, and there's not many people know how to do that. Everybody knows everybody else's business. Folks don't seem to know how good it is just to be quiet, to sit outside and listen to the sounds of the land. The land has a language, too, but you got to listen, and listen good, before you know what it's saying.

Sometimes I think the whole world's gone deaf and blind. Everybody fighting everybody else, and for what? For the land, and it belonging to itself. Oh, it's happened before. It's all in the Bible, but nobody reads the Bible anymore, except for a line here, a psalm there, a piece on Sunday. But that's not the way to do it. You got to read it straight through like a history book, because that's what it is. Back history. Anybody who wants to know what's coming can find it in there repeated over and over.

I've read the Book through more times than I can count. Took it out on the mountain and read it out loud, and watched the trees blowing and the clouds going over, the whole earth running on, and I knew what it was—poetry and literature and history all in one book—and that's the way a man should read it. High up somewhere, close to God, touching the land and the sky all at once, with time to listen and think things through.

I don't know but what I'm glad to be going. There's nothing a man can call his own anymore without paying for it twice over. Except friendship. And maybe love. But it's been my experience that even love depends on what's in a man's pocket.

I was courting a girl once, trying to put enough by to set up my own place. A man can't live with his family or his in-laws when he's married. Being married is hard enough without everybody giving advice, although Kate said she'd be happy with me anywhere. And maybe that was true. She was a happy woman then, round-faced and always laughing.

But she said she'd wait, and she did for a while. I worked cattle all over the state, even did a stint in the mines, though that wasn't work I was used to or liked. But those were hard times. I lost a horse and had to replace him, and I was off a lot on the cattle trains and didn't get home often. But I'd taken her at her word. Didn't think I had to keep coming back to make sure she still believed in our life together.

In the end she caught Crane Whittaker's eye, and maybe it was his money caught hers. The Running W's a big spread and a good one. She did her duty by him and it—five boys and as neat a house as I ever did see. But the laughter went out of her. I knew because I worked as Whittaker's foreman for a good many years, and I never once saw her lay her head back and laugh like she had with me. Truth is, I didn't go out of my way to see her. It rankled, her saying she'd wait and then going back on her word. Women are funny that way. Changeable.

Come down to it, only the fact of the land doesn't change. You care for it, and it takes care of you. That's what folks nowadays have got to learn. But I haven't been able to make anybody see. They come out here and say how beautiful it is and I want to tell them to go back home. I want to say when

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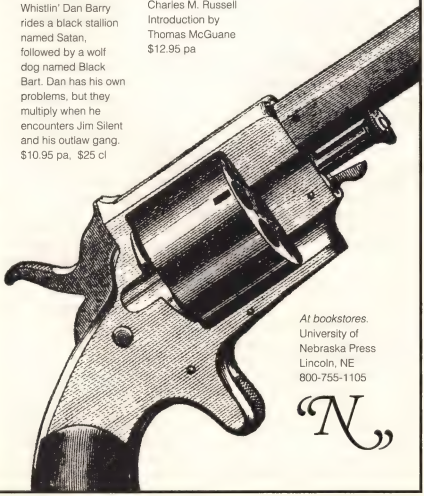

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"N"

I was a boy there were trees and flowers and animals that are gone now, disappeared because we're pumping out the water and tearing up the mountains and the flats just so everybody can have a piece and take from it without giving anything back.

Well, the land's still here, rock and soil, and at home I can wake up and look out and see the mountains running clear to Mexico and changing colors with the clouds and the sun, the hawks and buzzards riding the wind currents, and the mule and the mare off in the shade.

I hate to let Pete down, not go back. It's not right. And a place like this hospital is no place to die. I can't even see a piece of the sky, and there's never a time when it's quiet, when a man can lie back and think.

The Indians had the right idea. When a man's time came he just went out alone somewhere and waited for the spirit to go out of him, back into the wind or the mountains where it had come from, where it belonged.

Maybe that's what I'll do—lie here awhile and get up the strength to go home, and never a word to those doctors. Pete will understand why I've come. He knows my mind like I know his. He knows I've never gone back on my word. A man's word has to count for something, and that's just about all I've got left.

So I'll go home, and maybe the two of us can go up the mountain to where the ladybugs go. We can sit there and watch the meadow turn red as fire, watch the sun go down over the purple shadows of the valley. And when the night comes, we'll count the stars, name them—Orion, Betelgeuse, the Pleiades. And when we close our eyes we'll still see them. With luck they'll light our way.

CONEY GAME

by BILL PRONZINI

Quincannon said, "I've never seen a better counterfeit hundred, Mr. Boggs. Nearly perfect."

"Perfect enough to have fooled more than one bank teller." Boggs licked his Havana cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other—a habitual gesture of concern and irritation. "Recognize the coney work?"

"Not offhand, no."

"Take another look."

The hundred-dollar note, a series 1891 silver certificate bearing the portrait of James Monroe, lay on Quincannon's desk blotter. Sunlight slanting in through the agency window highlighted one corner of the bill; he moved it over until it lay entirely in the sun patch. As he took up his magnifying glass, Sabina rose from her desk and came to lean over his shoulder.

The counterfeit had been made, he judged, using one of the new processes of photolithography or photoengraving. The latter, most likely: the quality of reproduction was excellent, though not remarkably so, and the note bore the rich, dark lines of genuine government bills. There was a certain loss of detail,

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID BECK

though, of the sort caused by the erratic biting of acid during the etching process. The loss of detail was one thing that marked the hundred as bogus. He had noted others: the Treasury seal was lightly inked and looked pink instead of carmine; the bill's dimensions were a fraction of an inch too small in both width and length; and the formation of the letters spelling *James* under President Monroe's portrait showed evidence of either poor etchwork or acid burn. All of these flaws were minor enough to escape the naked eye—even a well-trained one. A glass was necessary to spot them.

The loss of detail was one thing that marked the hundred dollar bill as bogus. Quincannon had noted others.

The paper appeared to be genuine, carrying both the "U.S." watermark in several places and the large, prominent, colored silk threads used by the government's official papermaker, Crane & Co. of Dalton, Massachusetts. This would have been startling, given the rigid Treasury Department safeguards against the theft of banknote paper, except for two things. One was that the bogus note was a bit too thick. The other was that crisscrossing the engraved scroll lines were fine, colorless marks which ran in seeming confusion—the imprints of previous engraving.

Quincannon raked fingers through his thick freebooter's beard, cudgeling his memory. "Long Nick Darrow," he said at length.

"You haven't lost your eye," Boggs said, nodding. "No koniaker has ever done a better job of bleaching and bill-splitting than Darrow. This is his work or I'll eat my hat."

Sabina said, "Bleaching and bill-splitting?"

"An old trick," Quincannon explained. "The counterfeiter slices a one-dollar note lengthwise down the center, giving him two thin sheets. Then he bleaches each half to transparency with chemicals, places colored silk threads in the zone systems between the layers to resemble the authentic variety, pastes the halves back together, and reprints each side from his bogus hundred-dollar plates. A slight thickness from the paste is the giveaway. With a glass you can also make out the pressure marks from the original scrollwork on the one-dollar bill—the colors can be bleached out, but not those marks."

"I see. And Long Nick Darrow?"

"A koniaker I arrested in Montana twelve years ago, when I was with the Secret Service. One of the slipperiest coney men west of the Mississippi at that time." He looked at Boggs, head of the Service's San Francisco field office and his former chief. A round, graying man with a bulbous nose, Boggs had once been likened to a keg of whiskey with his nose as its bung—an apt description. "When did Darrow get out of prison?"

"Four months ago."

"Have you been able to trace his movements since?"

"No. He dropped out of sight as soon as he was released."

Quincannon tapped the phony hundred. "Where did this turn up?"

"Here in the city. Along with sixteen others, so far."

"The first one when?"

"Just last week. The president of First Western Bank spotted it and brought it to us. It wasn't until we'd rounded up the others that I began to suspect Darrow."

"So that's why you've come to us. You think Darrow had traveled here to run his new coney game."

"It would seem so. I felt you should know."

"Why, Mr. Boggs?" Sabina asked. "If this man Darrow is working at this old trade, it's a matter for your office, not a private agency. What can John and I do?"

"Be on your guard, Miss Carpenter."

"I don't understand."

"Long Nick Darrow swore to have his revenge on John when he was sent to prison," Boggs said. "Swore to track him down and shoot him dead. It wasn't an idle threat."

"But one made a dozen years ago . . ."

"A dozen years in which to nurse his hatred. That's the kind of man Darrow is."

"Then why hasn't he made an attempt on John's life? You said he's been free for four months. Surely, if he meant to carry out his threat, he'd have done so by now."

"Not necessarily. For one thing, Darrow worships money and all the fine vices it can support. Even revenge would become secondary to the care and feeding of his greed—and making and shoving queer is the only fast-money job he knows. For another thing, he isn't one to act rashly. He'll bide his time and savor his revenge."

"Savor it? You mean . . . he may already have been stalking John on the sly?"

"Just his sort of sport, yes."

Quincannon, silent through all of this, had been studying the note again. He lowered his glass now and sat back. "The plates that made this were photoengraved, wouldn't you say, Mr. Boggs?"

"I would. Every letter and line cut into the metal by hand, following the tracings of the photographic image—the same process used in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Except that Darrow didn't have the advantage of using a geometric lathe."

"But the process hadn't been perfected yet when Darrow went to prison. If I remember correctly, anastatic printing was his transfer method then." For Sabina's benefit Quincannon added, "He placed a genuine hundred on a zinc plate and transferred its ink to the metal with a solvent. Then he engraved the plate by following the inked lines and letters."

Boggs said, "A long, slow, and imperfect method. Photoengraving is faster and more certain—a boon to the koniakers and a headache for the Service. It's no surprise that Darrow would take advantage of the new, improved technique."

"You've had your operatives canvassing printing and engraving shops in the city and outlying areas?"

"Of course. But there are a damned lot of them, and as usual, we're short-handed."

"The shop would have to have a fairly large printing press to produce bills of this caliber," Quincannon mused. "That should narrow the field a bit."

"There are still more than two dozen to be checked, and better than half of those are outside the city. If we only had some sort of lead to follow . . ."

"What about the man who has been passing the queer? Or has there been more than one?"

"Two, evidently," Boggs said. "None of the bank tellers or merchants who accepted the notes could give a useful description of either one."

Quincannon took out his pipe, began to load it from the glass jar of tobacco on his desk. "Sabina and I may be able to provide some assistance. We have certain sources of information not available even to you."

"I've no doubt of that." Boggs licked his dead cigar back to the other side of his mouth, pushed his bulk upright, and reclaimed the counterfeit certificate. "Until we talk again, my friend, I'd advise you to keep a sharp eye on your backside."

"I'd rather keep a sharp eye on my partner's backside," Quincannon said wolfishly, a remark that at any other time would have aroused Sabina's indignation. It was a measure of her concern that she seemed not even to have heard it. He found this heartening. Underneath her reserve and her determination to keep their relationship strictly professional, there lurked a fondness for him that he was sure was almost as strong as his for her. They would be more than partners one day. He was as devoted to this end as she was to the opposite.

When Boggs was gone Sabina asked, "John, are you convinced that this man Darrow is the maker of that bogus hundred?"

"It seems likely."

"And are you also convinced that he plans to murder you?"

"Not so much of that, no. Boggs tends to leap to conclusions." He shrugged. "Besides, rougher men than Long Nick Darrow have sworn to bump me off, and a few have made the attempt. I'm a hard man to fit for a coffin."

"I've known others who felt the same. Each ended up wearing a headstone before his time."

"Not John Quincannon. I intend to remain aboveground a long while—at least long enough to convince you to share my bed and board."

"Then you'll live to ninety and still die frustrated."

Quincannon laughed. Without haste he went to put on his derby hat and Chesterfield. Sabina watched him narrowly, her hands fisted on slender hips. Her back was to the Market Street window; sunlight made the jeweled comb she wore in her sleek black hair shine as if with an inner fire.

"Rougher men than Long Nick Darrow have sworn to bump me off, and a few have made the attempt," Quincannon said.

"Where are you off to?" she asked.

"A walk on the Barbary Coast."

"I thought as much. While you're gone, I believe I'll try to find out if Long Nick Darrow has any known associates in the Bay Area—just in case. Which prison was he in?"

"Leavenworth."

"Good. I've dealt with the warden there before."

"You might also wire the Pinkerton office in Missoula. They had a file on Darrow twelve years ago."

"I'll do that. The Denver office, too." She followed him to the door. "You're an observant man," she said then. "If Darrow *has* been watching you, you'd have noticed the surveillance, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

"And you haven't?"

"No, my dear, I haven't."

But the truth was, he had. More than once during the past two weeks—not Darrow himself but a youngish, carrot-topped man who had given him the slip when he'd tried to accost him. He had withheld this from Sabina to spare her more worry. Now, despite what he'd said about Boggs leaping to conclusions, there was no question in his own mind of who had sent the carrot-top. Or that Long Nick Darrow was in San Francisco and did in fact plan to carry out his twelve-year-old threat.

The Barbary Coast had been infamous for nearly half a century as the West's seat of sin and wickedness, a "devil's playground" equaled by none other in the country and few in the world. There was a good deal of truth in this, as Quincannon well knew, but on a bright spring afternoon the area appeared relatively tame and not a little tawdry. As he made his way along Stockton Street he passed Cheap John clothing stores, rundown hotels and lodging houses, deadfalls, cheap dance halls, and a variety of cribs, cowyards, and parlor houses. One of the last sported a sign that never failed to bring a wry smile to his mouth:

MADAME LUCY
YE OLD WHORE SHOPPE

The streets were crowded: seamen, sports, gay blades; gamblers, pickpockets, swindlers, and roaming prostitutes. Quincannon was propositioned twice by painted women in the first two blocks. But for all of this, things were quiet at this hour, almost orderly. It was not until darkness settled that a man's valuables—and in some parts of the Coast, his life—were in jeopardy.

The center of the district was the three-block-square area between Broadway and Washington, Montgomery and Stockton streets. Ezra Bluefield's Scarlet Lady Saloon was here, an evil-looking building in an alley off Pacific Avenue. Until a short time ago, Bluefield had operated a crimping joint on these premises—a saloon where seamen were served doctored drinks composed of whiskey and gin and laced with laudanum or chloral hydrate, and then sold to shanghai shipmasters in need of crews. But the Sailor's Union of the Pacific had put an end to that, forcing the temporary closure of the Scarlet Lady. When enough bribes had been paid and Bluefield reopened the place, it was as a simple deadfall where customers were relieved of their cash by "pretty waiter girls," bunco ploys, and rigged games of chance. Knockout drops were used only when all other methods failed.

There had been three known murders in the Scarlet Lady, and any number of unknown ones, and brawls were common.

There had been three known murders in the Scarlet Lady, and any number of unknown ones, and brawls were common. But Bluefield remained aloof from it all. He employed several bouncers and vanished into his private office whenever trouble broke out. It wasn't that he was a coward; he'd had his share of fistfights and cutting scrapes. He considered himself above such rowdiness these days, having aspirations to own a better class of saloon in a reputable neighborhood. As a result he cultivated the company of respectable citizens, among them a reasonably honest private investigator, the city's finest, who had once saved him from assassination at the hands of a rival saloon owner.

Quincannon found Bluefield in his office, partaking of a huge plate of oysters on the half shell. He was a big man, Bluefield, with an enormous handlebar mustache, the ends of which were waxed to saber points. He waved Quincannon to a chair, slurped in one last oyster, washed it down with a draught of lager, and belched contentedly as he leaned back in his chair.

"Well, John, my lad, what can I do for you?" Small talk was not one of Bluefield's vices, a quality Quincannon found laudable.

"Supply the answers to a few questions, if you can."

"Gladly. If I can."

"Have you heard anything of a new coney game recently set up in the Bay Area? A major operation, evidently, involving hundred-dollar silver certificates."

"Not a whisper," Bluefield said. "Coney game, eh? Don't tell me you're working with old Boggs again?"

"Yes, but not officially. The gent we suspect of running the game swore to kill me when I sent him to prison a dozen years ago."

"Not a whisper of that, either. What's this scruff's name?"

"Long Nick Darrow."

Bluefield shook his head. "Description? Age?"

"Tall, long-necked, thin as a rail. Twelve years ago he wore a mustache and goatee and favored

fancy suits and brocade vests. He'll be close to fifty now."

"Not familiar. Habits?"

"Women, roulette, French food and wine. In that order of preference."

"If he's indulging himself on the Barbary Coast, or anywhere else in the city, I'll know it within forty-eight hours. But if he's lying low to work his game . . ." Bluefield shrugged and spread his hands.

"One other thing: It's likely he has a gent working for him with carroty hair, youngish and well set up."

"Right. I'll do what I can, lad."

Quincannon left Bluefield to his oysters and lager, and continued on his rounds of the Barbary Coast. He found and spoke with a Tar-Flat hoodlum named Luther James, a bunco steerer who went by the moniker of Breezy Ned, and a "blind" newspaper vendor known as Slewfoot—all of whom had sold him information in the past for cash or favors. As with Ezra Bluefield, none of the three had yet picked up a whisper about Long Nick Darrow and his coney game. Each promised to go on the earie, and to spread the word that Quincannon would pay handsomely for a proper tip.

There was little else he could do then except wait. A visit to the Hall of Justice would have been wasted: the San Francisco police disliked private detectives in general and Quincannon in particular, since he was far more successful at catching crooks than they were. Besides which, the city's minions of the law were openly corrupt—more corrupt than Long Nick Darrow and Ezra Bluefield combined; they would be too busy collecting graft to know or care that a notorious koniaker was operating in their bailiwick. The only ones who could put an end to Darrow's game were Boggs and his handful of Secret Service operatives, and/or John Quincannon.

Sabina was a strict guardian of her private life. Her reticence aroused both Quincannon's frustration and his jealousy.

The next two days were uneventful. There was no word off the Barbary Coast, and Sabina's telegrams produced negative results. Quincannon went about his business, and was satisfied that he wasn't followed and that no one was watching the agency offices or his rooming house. The carrot-topped gent had either been frightened off, or Darrow had already learned all he felt necessary abut his quarry's habits and activities.

On the afternoon of the second day, a Friday, Quincannon paid a call on Boggs at the Service's cubbyhole field offices at the San Francisco Mint. The branch chief had nothing new to report. "We've nearly finished checking all printing and engraving shops in and out of the city," he said. "None seems to be even a mild candidate for Darrow's operation."

"He's a sly fox," Quincannon said. "It could be that he arranged to ship in a dismantled press and have it set up in a warehouse or abandoned building. And brought along an out-of-state printer to run it."

Boggs nodded gloomily and tongue-rolled his perpetual dead cigar. "Expensive ploy, but it wouldn't surprise me. If that's the case, it might take weeks to track down the location."

"Darrow won't stay that long. He'll get wind soon, if he hasn't already, that you've tumbled to his bogus silver certificates. Once his gang has difficulty passing them, he'll cut and run."

"But first, he'll have his try at you."

"*Try* is the word, Mr. Boggs. If it comes to that, it'll be his downfall."

That evening Quincannon dined alone at Pop Sullivan's Hoffman Cafe, one of his favorite haunts during his drinking days and still a lure now and then. He'd asked Sabina to join him, but she had declined; she had another engagement, she said. Whether the engagement was with a gentleman or a lady friend, she had refused to confide. Her reticence aroused both his frustration and his jealousy. She was a strict guardian of her private life; he knew little enough about it. But she was a healthy and attractive young woman, and doubtless she had male suitors by the score. The thought that she might allow one of them to spend a passionate few hours in her Russian Hill flat was maddening—almost as maddening as the possibility that she would say yes to a marriage proposal from someone other than John Quincannon.

After dinner he went straight to his rooms on Sutter Street, where he made an attempt to read from Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes*. Usually poetry relaxed him; on this night, however, it did nothing to ease his restlessness. He was on the verge of going out again, for a long walk this time, when a knock sounded on his door.

He answered it warily, one hand on his Navy Colt. But the

caller was a welcome one: a runner for Ezra Bluefield, bearing a sealed envelope. The contents of the envelope, a brief note in the saloon owner's bold hand, brightened his mood considerably.

John, my lad—

You may find it enlightening to have a talk with Bob Podewell, 286 Spear Street. He is a young and well set up carrot-top and he has been heard to brag while in his cups of an affiliation with "a clever blackleg who is taking the Treasury Department for a ride." The blackleg himself appears to be saving the public indulgence of his vices for a later time.

uincannon drew his Colt, went into the strip of blackness along the south wall, and felt his way along the rough brick.

Quincannon made a mental note to send Bluefield a bottle of good Scotch whiskey. Then he checked the loads in his Navy, donned his Chesterfield, and hurried out into a roiling fog that had robbed the city of its daytime warmth.

The section of Spear Street where Bob Podewell resided was close to the Embarcadero and the massive bulk of the Ferry Building. Flanking its dark length was a mix of warehouses, stores operated by ship's chandlers and outfitters, and lodging houses that catered to seamen, laborers, and shop workers. Whoever Podewell was, he had been in pinched circumstances before hooking up with Long Nick Darrow—if, in fact, he *had* hooked up with Darrow—and was still too little paid, or perhaps too miserly, to move to better quarters.

There was no one abroad as Quincannon turned onto Spear from Mission Street. Or at least no one visible to him. He hadn't been followed from his rooming house, he was certain of that, but the waterfront was a rough place at night; a man alone, particularly a man who was rather nattily dressed, was fair prey for footpads. He walked swiftly, his gaze probing the swirls of mist. Out on the Bay, foghorns moaned in ceaseless rhythm. As he crossed Howard he had glimpses of pier sheds and the masts and steam funnels of anchored ships, gray-black and indistinct like disembodied ghosts.

Number 286 took shape ahead—a three-story firetrap built of warping wood, never painted and sorely in need of carpentry work. Smears of electric light showed at the front entrance, illuminating a sign that grew readable as he neared: Drake's Rest—Rooms by Day, Week, Month.

Inside he found a narrow lobby that smelled of salt-damp and decay. Behind the desk, a scrawny harridan was feeding crackers to an equally scrawny parrot in a cage. It was even money as to which owned the more evil eye, the woman or the bird. Hers ran Quincannon up and down in a hungry fashion, as if she would have liked nothing better than to knock him on the head and steal his valuables.

He greeted her and then gave Bob Podewell's name.

"What about him?"

"I've business with the gent. Is he in?"

"No. What business would a swell like you have with the likes of Bob Podewell?"

"Mine and his, madam. Where might I find him?"

"Madam," she said. "Faugh! How would I know?"

Quincannon took a silver dollar from his pocket, flipped it high so that it caught the light from the ceiling globe. The woman's greedy eye followed its path up and back down into his palm. She licked her thin lips.

"Now, then," he said. "Where does Bob spend his evenings?"

"The Bucket of Blood Saloon, I hear tell, when he's not working late at his miserable job." Her gaze was still fixed on the coin.

"He works late some nights, does he?"

"Didn't used to. Does now."

"What's his job?"

"Picture-taker's assistant."

"For which picture-taker?"

"Name of Drennan."

"Address of Mr. Drennan's shop?"

"Fremont Street, near Mission. Brick 'un next to the rope-and-twine chandler's."

"Storefront? Or does Mr. Drennan own the entire building?"

"Entire. So I hear tell."

Quincannon tossed her the silver dollar. She caught it expertly, bit it between snaggle teeth. The parrot cackled and said, "Ho, money! Ho, money!" She glared at the bird, then cursed it as Quincannon turned for the door. She seemed genuinely concerned that the parrot might break out of its cage and take the coin away from her.

Outside, Quincannon allowed his lips to stretch in a humorless grin. Photographer's assistant,

eh? Well, well. Unless he missed his guess, a showdown with Long Nick Darrow was closer at hand than either of them had anticipated.

The brick building on Fremont Street was long and narrow, flanked on its north side by the rope-and-twine chandler's and on the south side by a pipe yard. Alleyways and tall board fences gave it privacy from in front. No lights showed behind the plate glass window in front. Quincannon stepped up to the window, read the words *Matthew Drennan, Photographer,* painted there, then laid his ear against the cold, fog-damp glass. He could just make out a steady sound—part metallic thud and part hiss and hum—that came from the rear. The sound was percussive enough to cause the window to vibrate faintly against his ear.

He drew his Colt, went around and into the strip of blackness along the south wall. He felt his way along the rough brick, sliding his feet so as not to trip over any hidden obstacles. Toward the rear the thud and hiss became audible again, muffled by the thick wall. Then it grew louder still—and his groping fingers discovered a recess in the bricks, touched the wood of a door.

He shouldered in close, located the latch. It was unlocked and the door unbarred. When he eased it inward a few inches, pale lamplight illuminated the opening, and the throbbing rhythm increased twofold. But its source was still some distance away, behind another closed door in the bowels of the building.

Quincannon raised his weapon, pushed the alley door the rest of the way inward. Storage room. The light came from a hanging lantern, revealing a clutter of photographic equipment: cameras and tripods, printing frames, lenses, chemicals, boxes labeled *Mr. Eastman's Instantaneous Dry Plates.* That was all the room contained: no one had been stationed here to watch over the alley entrance.

Carefully Quincannon moved inside, shut the alley door, and crossed to the inner one. He inched it free of its jamb. The machinery noise, then, was almost deafening. When he laid an eye to the opening he saw exactly what he'd expected to see, across a dusty expanse of warehouse floor lit by electric ceiling bulbs.

The printing press took up the entire far half of the open room. No wonder Darrow's bogus hundred-dollar notes were of such high quality: the press was not one of the old-fashioned single-plate, hand-roller types, but rather a small steam-powered Milligan that would perform the printing, inking, and wiping simultaneously through the continuous movement of four plates around a square frame. It was being operated at the moment by a middle-aged man wearing a green eyeshade and a leather apron—a hired printer, or perhaps Matthew Drennan himself. A second man, young and orange-haired, stood at a long wooden bench laden with tools and chemicals and tins of ink: Bob Podewell. There was no one else in sight.

Long Nick Darrow was a sly fox, all right, Quincannon thought with grudging admiration. No one would think to look for a team press in a photographer's warehouse, even though a picture-taker was a likely member of Darrow's coney gang. An expert photographic reproduction of a genuine government bill was an essential ingredient in the photoengraving process he was now using.

Quincannon debated. Should he arrest these two himself, or report to Boggs and let him do the honors? Darrow was the man he wanted; if Darrow were present, he wouldn't hesitate. Still—two birds in hand. And chances were, the birds would know where Long Nick could be found.

With a clank and a hiss, the Milligan press shut down abruptly. The silence that followed the racket was acute—and in that silence Quincannon heard a small, new sound behind him.

Someone was opening the alley door.

He wheeled in a half crouch. In the lantern glow he saw a man framed in the doorway, at the same instant the man saw him.

The bullet struck high above Quincannon's head, showering him with brick dust. He fired at the muzzle flash.

There was a frozen brace of seconds as they recognized and stared at each other. Then Long Nick Darrow flung himself backward and sideways, and the foggy darkness swallowed him before Quincannon could trigger a shot.

He ran across the storage room, out into the alley. It was like hurling himself into a vat of India ink; wet black closed around him and he could see nothing but vague shapes beyond ragged tendrils of mist. He listened, heard only silence, took two steps toward the rear—

Something swung out of the murk, struck him squarely across the left temple, and knocked him over like a ninepin.

It was not the first time he had been hit on or about the head, and his skull had withstood harder blows without serious damage or loss of consciousness. He didn't lose consciousness now, though his thoughts rattled around like pebbles in a tin can. He rolled over onto his knees and forearms, then hoisted himself unsteadily to his feet. Pain throbbed in his temple; there was a ringing in his ears. He realized he still held his revolver—and realized a second later that he was now standing in the faint outspill of light from the storage room. He had just enough time to dodge forward, in tight against the wall, before the gun crashed from a short distance away.

The bullet struck high above his head, showering him with brick dust. He fired at the muzzle flash; missed in the dark. A moment later, the sound of running steps penetrated the fading buzz in his ears. An oath swelled his throat. He bit it back, set out blindly after the retreating footfalls.

He ran in close to the wall, heedless of obstacles now, shaking his head to clear it. Blood trickled warm and sticky down over his right cheek, adding fuel to his outrage. The fleeing steps veered off to the right, were replaced by scraping sounds, then commenced again at a greater distance. Quincannon's mental processes steadied. There must be a second, north-south alley intersecting this one behind Drennan's building. He slowed, saw the intersection materialize through the fog, and swung himself around the corner into the new passage.

Where, after six paces, he ran into a wooden fence.

He caromed off, staggering. The oath once more swelled his throat and this time two of its smoky words slipped out. He plunged back to the fence, caught the top, and scaled its six-foot height. When he dropped down on the far side he could hear Darrow's steps more clearly. The fog was patchier here; he was able to see all the way to the dull shine of an electric street lamp on Howard Street beyond. A running shadow was just blending into other shadows there, toward the Embarcadero.

Quincannon's humor was black and smoldering as he made his way back to Fremont Street.

When he reached the corner he skidded to a halt, breathing in thick wheezes. Visibility was still good: he could make out the counterfeiter's tall, thin shape less than half a block away. He ran again, lengthening his strides, and he was fifteen rods behind when Darrow crossed Beale Street. Gaining on him, by God. He dashed across Beale. But as he came up onto the sidewalk on the opposite side, the koniaker disappeared once more.

Another alleyway, this one dirt-floored, Quincannon saw as he reached its mouth. He turned into it cautiously. No ambush this time: Darrow was still on the lammas. He rushed ahead, managed to reach the far end without blundering into anything. He slowed there long enough to determine that the footsteps were now coming from the right, in the direction of Folsom Street. He went that way, spotted Darrow some distance ahead—and then, again, didn't see him. Nor were his footfalls audible any longer.

The fog was thick-pocketed that way; the shimmery lamps of a hansom cab at the far intersection were barely visible. At a walk now, Quincannon continued another ten paces. Close by, then, he heard the nervous neighing of a horse, followed by a similar sound from a second horse. A few more paces, and the faint glow of a lantern materialized. Another slender wedge of yellow came from the right. One of the horses nickered again, and harness leather creaked. He heard nothing else.

He kept moving until he could identify the sources of the light. One came from a lantern mounted on a wagon drawn by two dray animals which filled the width of the alley, and the other from a partially open door to the building on the right—a two-story brick structure with an overhanging balcony at the second level. Above the door was a sign that was just discernible: *McKenna's Ale House.*

The wagon was laden with medium-sized kegs, which indicated a late delivery to the saloon. There was no sign of anyone human. Quincannon drew closer, peering to the right because that direction offered the largest amount of space for passage around the wagon.

The hurled object came from the left. Quincannon saw it—one of the kegs—in time to pitch his body sidewise against the alehouse wall. The keg sailed past his head, missing him by precious little, slammed into the bricks above, and broke apart. He threw his arm up to protect his head as staves and metal strapping and the contents of the keg rained down on him.

Beer. A green and pungent lager.

The foamy brew drenched him from head to foot, got into his eyes and mouth and nose. Spluttering, he pawed at his face and shook his head like a bewildered bull—and Darrow's revolver banged again from behind the wagon.

The shot was wild. Quincannon recoiled backward, slipped in the beer mud, and nearly fell. The slip was fortunate because it took him out of the way of a second bullet. He staggered, righted himself, started to rush forward—and was almost brained by a plunging hoof on one of the frightened dray horses. Again he dodged, again he slipped. There were shots from inside McKenna's Ale House, and then, audible among them, the resumed pound of Darrow's running steps.

The saloon's rear door opened and a pair of curious heads poked out. Quincannon, recovering, brandished the Navy and the heads disappeared so quickly they might never have been there at all. He slid along the bricks, rubbing at his beer-stung eyes. The dray horses were still shuffling around in harness, though neither was plunging any longer. He pushed past them and the wagon, ran out to Folsom Street.

The fog rolling up from the waterfront was as thick as Creole gumbo. All he could hear was the ever-present clanging of fog bells. All he could see was empty, damp-swirled darkness.

Long Nick Darrow had vanished again. And this time there was no picking up his trail.

Quincannon's humor was black and smoldering as he made his way back to Fremont Street. Darrow had not only gotten away, but twice had narrowly missed killing shots from a handgun. And he, Quincannon, had suffered the added indignities of a mushy and painful wound on his temple

Quincannon moved to the front gate and crossed to the stair. The house's stillness seemed almost funereal.

where the koniaker had clubbed him, a knot on his forehead from his collision with the fence, torn and beer-drenched clothing, and the lingering scent of a derelict. If he could lay hands on Darrow this minute, he'd tear him limb from limb.

And where *was* Darrow now? Gone to wherever he'd been living, to hatch a new plan? It was unlikely that he would risk returning to the warehouse of Matthew Drennan, Photographer. Or that either Bob Podewell or the middle-aged gent who had been operating the Milligan press would still be there; the shot fired by Darrow in the alley would surely have panicked them and sent them on the lammas. But Quincannon had nowhere else to go. The warehouse was his only link to the koniaker.

From the street in front, the building still wore its dark cloak. He disdained the alley this time; with his Navy in hand he approached the front entrance, listened, heard nothing, and proceeded to open the rather flimsy door lock with his set of burglar picks. No sounds came to him as he stepped inside. He struck a lucifer, and by its pale light he found his way into the rear warehouse section.

The overhead electrics still burned there, but as he'd expected, the place was now abandoned. Darrow's accomplices had stayed long enough to gather up most of the already printed counterfeit notes; several bills lay scattered across the floor, testimony to the haste of their departure.

Quincannon went to have a look at the press. And smiled grimly when he found the counterfeit plates still attached to the machine. Fear had dominated the two accomplices, kept them from tarrying even the extra few minutes it would have taken to remove the plates and carry them away, too. Darrow would be livid when he found this out. The plates were far more valuable to a coney man than a few hundred bogus certificates.

Quincannon detached the plates, wrapped them in a piece of burlap, and slid them into his sodden Chesterfield pocket. Then he commenced a rapid search of the rest of the building, looking for some clue that might lead him to Darrow.

He found one almost immediately, and it disconcerted as well as enlightened him. A small room off the warehouse section had been outfitted with a cot, worktable, and a variety of foodstuffs and potables. There was French pâté in an ice chest, along with three bottles of expensive French wine. And hanging from a water pipe were three good, rather flashy cheviot suits and three equally flashy brocade vests.

Long Nick Darrow had been living *here*. Made his counterfeit plates here, distributed the queer from here, holed up here the entire time he'd been in San Francisco.

And now he was on the run,

without his plates, without most of his bogus notes, and with only the clothes on his back.

Where would he go?

A thought wormed its way into Quincannon's mind—an ugly and fearful thought that raised the hackles on his nape. After the

The horse frog-danced backward, causing the buggy to lurch. Quincannon slipped on the wet grass and went down hard.

chase through the foggy streets, Darrow would be filled with as much hatred for his nemesis as Quincannon felt for him. One thing he might do was to make for Sutter Street, set up an ambush at Quincannon's rooming house. But there was also another, even more devilish plan of action that his sly brain might lead him to take.

Sabina. Suppose he'd gone after Sabina?

The hansom cab let Quincannon off half a block uphill from Sabina's Russian Hill flat. He had already paid the driver on Market Street; the hackie, chary of Quincannon's appearance and ripe lager smell, had refused to permit him inside the cab until he'd handed over his money in advance. He hurried away from the hansom now without a backward glance, keeping to the shadows cast by shade trees and hedges.

The house in which Sabina lived was one of a row of smallish, two-flat Victorians set back from the sidewalk behind iron picket fences. Her flat, upstairs, showed light behind drawn front curtains. As late as it was—after midnight—this might have been unusual, except for the fact of her unexplained engagement. She might be entertaining her companion, damn his eyes if it was a man. Or she might have just arrived home, alone, and hadn't yet prepared for bed.

The other possibility was Long Nick Darrow.

Quincannon moved to the front gate. Shrubbery and cypress hedges choked the yard within, offering plenty of cover. The fog was thinner here on the hillside, torn and driven high by an icy wind off the ocean; he shivered in his still-wet clothing as he drifted through the gate, crossed to the stairs. No sounds came to him other than the wind, the distant, muffled clanging of cable car bells, the fog warnings from the buoys on the bay. The house's stillness seemed almost funereal.

He considered climbing to the foyer, picking the lock on the front door. Then he remembered that there was an outside stairway at the rear that led straight up to a landing outside Sabina's kitchen —a more direct access and only a single lock to deal with. A branch of the gate path hooked around on the Victorian's east side. He started that way, only to stop again, abruptly, after half a dozen steps.

The light in Sabina's front window had just gone out.

To bed, now? Alone, he fervently hoped, if so. He listened—still nothing from the house—and then went ahead along the path, pacing carefully in the clotted darkness.

The rear yard extended back some thirty rods, to where a woodshed and a small carriage barn marked the end of the property. Half a dozen fruit trees threw thick puddles of shadow, their bloom-heavy branches clicking and rattling in the wind. This noise kept him from hearing the footfalls on the outside rear stairs until he reached the corner.

He froze for three heartbeats, then craned his neck and upper body forward so he could peer around toward the stairs. Two shapes were descending, neither fast nor slow, one below the other. He couldn't see them clearly until they reached the yard and moved away from the staircase. Then his lips flattened in tight against his teeth; fury inflated his chest like a bellows.

The shape in the lead, walking stiff-backed, was Sabina.

And the man behind her was Darrow.

Quincannon had to restrain himself from taking rash action. In the windy dark he didn't dare risk firing a shot that might miss Darrow and strike Sabina instead. Or one that might miss both and cause the counterfeiter to shoot Sabina in retaliation; the elongated blob in his right hand was surely a gun. And the grass was too wet, the footing too uncertain to chance gliding up on him from behind, unseen and unheard. Quincannon held his ground, chafing at the necessity to watch and wait, as Darrow herded Sabina toward the carriage barn.

At first he thought they were bound for the barn. But as they neared it, they veered off to a gate in the boundary fence nearby. Heavy tree shadow swallowed them. He couldn't wait any longer; as soon as they vanished he stepped out from the house wall and passed as swiftly as he dared among the fruit trees, at an angle that brought him up against the barn's side wall.

He could hear them then, out in

the carriageway that bisected the block. Heard, too, the faint whicker of a horse and the rattle of a bit chain. Darrow had some kind of conveyance waiting there, no doubt one that he'd recently stolen.

Quincannon went to the rear corner, looked out into the carriageway. The conveyance, standing only a few rods off, was an open buggy drawn by a single horse. Darrow stood at the driver's step, gesturing for Sabina to climb up to the seat.

"No balking now." The koniaker's voice carried distinctly on the wind. "Climb up and sit down, if you know what's good for you."

"Where are you taking me?"

"You'll find that out soon enough."

"And when we get there? What will you do then?"

Darrow made a chuckling sound. "Your virtue is safe with me, if that's worrying you."

"It isn't." Sabina sounded calm and unruffled, which came as no surprise to Quincannon. She was as fearless and as capable in a crisis as any man he'd ever known. "Kidnapping is a serious crime, Mr. Darrow."

"So is counterfeiting. But neither is as serious as one other."

"Murder, you mean. Are you planning to murder me?"

"That depends on you, Miss Carpenter."

"You won't get away with it if you do. John will hound you to the ends of the earth."

"Your man John won't be alive to hound anyone."

"So that's your scheme, is it? Use me to lure John so you can kill him."

"I should have killed him weeks ago, when I first came to this wretched city. And I damned well should have seen him dead earlier tonight. Twice I came within inches of putting a bullet in his brain. Twice! He has more lives than an alley cat."

"Yes, and you won't take any of them."

"Won't I? Watch and see. Climb up, now, and be quick. I've no patience left for this."

Quincannon backed away from the corner. When he heard the buggy creak under Sabina's weight, the skittish movements of the horse, he hurried around to the front of the barn and across to its far corner. From there he could see that the fence gate was still open. He stepped out, his boots sliding noiselessly through the tall grass. Darrow was still facing toward the buggy, waiting for Sabina to settle into the seat. Quincannon kept going to the fence, turned through the opening, went straight and fast toward Darrow with his Navy at arm's length. He was still afraid to risk a shot from more than a short distance away.

Twenty feet separated them when the counterfeiter heard or sensed his approach. Darrow swung around, bringing his weapon to bear. Quincannon had no choice but to fire then, and he did so without hesitation; but on the move as he was, his aim was off. The bullet struck Darrow —the man's yell of pain proved that—but it neither disarmed him nor put him on the ground. Quincannon would have fired a second time, and Darrow might have managed to trigger a round at him, if it hadn't been for the buggy horse's startled reaction to the first shot.

The animal frog-danced backward, causing the buggy to lurch and side-jump. The footboard caught Darrow's leg, pitched him off balance; and Quincannon, in trying to dodge out of harm's way, slipped on the wet grass and went down hard on his backside. The jarring impact robbed him of his grip on the Colt; the heavy weapon struck his boot, bounced into the grass. He scrambled onto one knee, groping for the revolver—and out of the tail of his eye he saw Darrow recover his balance. The koniaker still held his weapon and was raising it. Quincannon's fingers touched the butt of the Navy, but even as he gathered it into his hand he knew it was too late: Darrow would fire first, and at this distance he wasn't likely to miss.

That was not what happened.

Long Nick Darrow had no chance to fire.

Sabina had managed to drop free of the buggy, and in that moment, from behind Darrow, she swung something long and thin at his head, in the fashion of a baseball player swinging at a pitched ball. It made the same sort of meaty smacking sound when it connected. The koniaker was upright and aiming one instant, and the next he was flat on his face in the grass, unmoving. He hadn't uttered a sound.

Quincannon straightened, turned to Sabina, and gathered her against him in a tight embrace.

A little shakily, Quincannon gained his feet. He and Sabina asked each other if they were all right. Then he holstered his Colt, went to bend over Darrow and feel for his pulse.

Sabina said, "Is he alive?"

"Temporarily senseless. What did you hit him with?"

"The buggy whip. Reversed with the grip forward."

"A mighty blow, my dear. You saved my life."

"Just as you were about to save mine."

"True. We make a fine team, eh?"

"Professionally speaking, yes."

Professionally speaking. Bah. He straightened, turned to her, and gathered her against him in a tight embrace. She permitted the intimacy for no more than three seconds before she pushed him away.

"John, for heaven's sake! You smell like six nights in a brewery."

He nodded ruefully. "How well I know it."

"You haven't broken your vow of abstinence?"

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"No. But this has been one of those nights," he said with feeling, "when I wish I'd never taken the pledge in the first place."

Boggs said, "I invited you both to dinner not only as a token of my gratitude but to pass along more good news. Two of my operatives arrested Matthew Drennan and Bob Podewell this afternoon in Oakland. They were trying to pass one of the bogus hundreds at the railway station, for passage to Sacramento and points east. They've been holed up over there for the past four days."

"Did you recover the rest of the queer?" Sabina asked.

"Every last bill."

"How many others in the gang are still at large?"

"None. Drennan worked as a printer before he became a photographer; got out of the printing game, in fact, after serving time in jail in Texas. He and Darrow once worked a coney game together in El Paso. Darrow got word that Drennan had relocated in San Francisco, approached him with his scheme, and talked him off the straight and narrow. Podewell was their helper and bill-passer—"

Quincannon interrupted Boggs's explanation by sneezing loudly. So loudly that conversations also ceased among the other diners—this was Coppa's Restaurant in the Montgomery block, one of the city's tonier eateries—and a number of heads turned to stare at him. He paid no attention. He took out his handkerchief, blew his nose with a noise like a honking mallard.

Sabina asked, "John, do you feel all right?"

"As well as I've felt in four miserable days."

"Perhaps you should've spent another day in bed. That cold of yours seems to be lingering. If you're not careful it could turn into the grippe."

"I refuse to be an invalid. Besides, I've recovered my appetite. Where's our blasted food?"

Their blasted food was on the way to the table. When the waiter had distributed the steaming dishes and departed, Boggs said, "Well, to finish what I was saying, all the principals in the coney game are now behind bars. Neither of you will ever have to worry about Long Nick Darrow again. He'll get at least twenty years at hard labor, this time."

"All well and good," Quincannon said around a mouthful of Coppa's specialty, Chicken Pórtola, "but little enough satisfaction for me in the whole sorry business."

Boggs frowned. "Little enough satisfaction? Your life's no longer in jeopardy—isn't that enough?"

"Not as I see it. There's plenty of satisfaction for you, Mr. Boggs. A coney operation has been broken before much damage could be done and your superiors in Washington are singing your praises."

"I've given *you* full credit for capturing Darrow and confiscating his plates. The glory is yours, not mine."

"Glory. Bah. I was nearly killed three times Friday night, as well as drenched in beer and deprived of my favorite suit and Chesterfield, and then forced to spend three days in bed with chills and fever. And what do I have to show for these indignities? Nothing."

"Show for them? I don't understand what you mean."

"He means," Sabina said, "that he wasn't and won't be paid a fee."

"That's right, not a red cent." Quincannon sneezed again. "I've no objection to being shot at or having my clothing and my health damaged, in exchange for a proper fee. But in this case I can't collect from you, Mr. Boggs, or from the government, or from Long Nick Darrow. The worst possible client a poor suffering detective can have is himself!"

by T. V. Olsen

Jacob's Journal

June 8, 1886

Sarah is dead. I killed her with my own hands and buried her beneath tons of rock. I know she is dead. Yet this forenoon I saw her... alive?

I do not know. But I saw her as clearly as I see the page on which I indite these words.

I was crossing from the commandant's office to the agency house—a longish walk of perhaps two hundred yards—when I became aware of being watched. I turned my head and saw her—a woman standing on the prickly pear and chaparral covered rise a little south of the agency house.

At first I took only passing note, supposing her to be the wife of one of Fort Bloodworth's officers or enlisted men. But something in the way she stood, absolutely motionless and watching me, as I believed, arrested my attention. Leaving the well-worn path, I started across the intervening hundrd or so yards of nearly barren ground toward her.

I was quite close before I recognized her, but when I did, recognition came unmistakably. The sunlight lay full on her face and on the brightness of her red-gold hair.

"The woman on the knoll wore a voluminous dress with a wide skirt, yet the fabric was unstirring in the blast of wind."

It was Sarah.

I stopped, petrified with fear and incomprehension. Either I was experiencing a hallucination or I was the victim of some gigantic hoax. But the latter possibility, at least, seemed out of the question. None but I—I was positive—knew the truth behind my wife's sudden disappearance.

Screwing up my courage, I advanced slowly toward her. I was nearly to the rise when my nerve broke utterly and I shouted her name. Screamed it, more than likely.

Until that moment she had neither moved nor changed her expression by a hair breadth. It was as severe and aloof as—damn her soul—Sarah had so long been toward me.

Now I saw her smile. A lovely and alluring smile, one such as I had rarely seen on her face during our years together. And while she smiled, she slowly raised an arm and beckoned to me. Then she turned, not hurrying, and walked over the crest of the rise and out of sight.

When I had scrambled to its top, she was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished as if the rocky soil and scant vegetation had swallowed her up. Impossible! When I looked for any tracks that might help solve the riddle, I found nothing—not even the trace of a footprint. Still, the ground was so stony and impervious to ordinary sign that even a skilled tracker might have found nothing. Except . . .

The fact comes to mind only now, as though earlier, my mind had rejected the knowing. A hot wind was blowing off the desert, strongly enough to whip particles against my face. The woman on the knoll wore a voluminous dress with a wide skirt, identical to that in which I buried Sarah.

Yet in all the time I saw her, the woman's clothing, the drape of its fabric, was unstirring in the blast of wind. As though the wind could not touch her, could not have its way with her in any particular. . . .

With the last few sentences, the bold sprawl of Jacob Creed's rapid writing turned into a shaky, dashed-off waver. Then the entry suddenly ended.

Major Phineas Casement had been reading slowly aloud from the leather-bound journal he had slipped open at random, pausing often to squint at the words, swearing and muttering. Now he said a disgusted oath, slapped the journal shut, and tossed it on his desk.

"Good God, what a pack of nonsense! Sheer balderdash. The fellow must have been deranged."

"Possibly, sir," said Lieutenant Mayberly. "But every entry he made in that book, if you except this one persistent delusion, has proved out to a detail."

"I'm sure, Mr. Mayberly. I'm sure. That fine, probing intellect of yours would do its damnedest to ferret out the whole truth, no matter where it led."

Major Casement reached for the humidor on his desk, extracted a cigar, and offered the humidor to Mayberly with an impatient thrust of his hand. Politely, as Casement had known he would, the lieutenant refused a cigar.

Major Casement pushed his swivel chair back from his desk and rose to his feet, grimacing as the movement peeled his blouse sweatily away from his back and paunch. Arizona Territory . . . Christ, you'd think that after a dozen years of being stationed at one or another of its raw frontier outposts, a man would be used to the furnace heat of its relentless summers.

He lifted a foot onto the chair, struck a match on the heel of his high cavalry boot, and lit the cigar, glancing enviously at the younger officer, seated at ease in the room's only other chair.

Mayberly looked as cool as a January thaw. His double-breasted blue miner's blouse and blue trousers, with the yellow cavalry stripe down the outseams, were hardly stained by dust, not at all by sweat. His black, neatly blocked campaign hat rested on the knee of his crossed leg; his dark hair was cleanly parted above a sober, cleft-chinned face. The subaltern was only a year out of West Point; Fort Bloodworth was his first assignment. Yet he'd blended into this inhospitable land with the adaptability of a chuckwalla lizard. A leather dispatch case was propped against his chair.

Major Casement swiped a hand over his sweat-dewed, nearly bald head, clamped the cigar between his bulldog jaws, and slowly paced his narrow office, up and down. "The fellow was a heavy drinker, I'm told. How much of that persistent delusion of his came out of a bottle?"

"There may or may not be a way of telling, sir." Lieutenant Mayberly leaned forward to take Creed's journal from the desk. He flipped backward through the pages. "In any case, the journal entries which are of main concern

to us begin at a much earlier date. May I quote from them?"

Major Casement rolled out an irritable plume of smoke.

It would be his duty to write up a full report on the whole unsavory mess to the Secretary of War and file a duplicate report with the U.S. Department of the Interior, since Jacob Creed had been the agent assigned to one of the hellholes they called their Indian reservations. Before doing so, the major would need as thorough a briefing as possible from his ultracompetent aide, Mayberly, whom he'd ordered to investigate the almost simultaneous deaths of Agent Jacob Creed and Colonel Richard Dandridge, Fort Bloodworth's late commandant. Major Casement had been hastily dispatched here to replace Dandridge, and Mayberly had already given the major a sketchy report on his findings.

"By all means, Mr. Mayberly," Casement said sourly. "The damned fellow's hand is so execrable I could scarcely make out the words. Read it aloud, if you please."

May 17, 1886

Today, after two months at this Godforgotten post, cautiously trying the tempers of the officers at Fort Bloodworth as well as those of the headmen on the adjacent reservation, I made my approach to Colonel Dandridge. Not only is he in the ideal position to abet my scheme, he possesses the requisite qualities to implement it.

Beneath his facade of an efficient and highly regarded career officer (President Lincoln himself bestowed a Medal of Honor on him during the late conflict), Dandridge is a savagely bitter and disillusioned man. This in consequence of his being several times passed over for advancement to a brigadier generalship, due to favoritism toward officers of far lesser qualification who were, nevertheless, politically well situated. . . .

The echo of taps died away in the gray twilight. Lamps winked out as darkness closed over the parade ground of Fort Bloodworth. From the Chiricahua reservation to the south drifted the lone, keening bark of a camp dog.

Jacob Creed had locked up his sutler's post. Standing on the porch, teetering gently back and forth on his heels, feeling mellow as all hell, he took an embossed whiskey flask from his coat pocket, uncapped it, and took a small swig.

Creed was a bearded, thickset man whose coarsened features and bloodshot eyes showed little of his genteel background. His

"Not only is Colonel Dandridge in the ideal position to abet my scheme, he possesses the requisite qualities to implement it."

belly was badly burning from the effects of intermittent drinks he'd consumed during a day of haggling with the Apaches who came to trade at his post. By now the damned siwashes should be aware that no one left Jacob Creed on the short end of a trade. Yet they never ceased trying. All the bastards were.

Creed chuckled quietly. He treated himself to another pull at the flask. Things would be different from now on. A hell of a lot different.

As to bartering with him, the Apaches had little choice. Post trader Jacob Creed was also the Indian agent for the San Lazaro Reservation. In addition to his government salary, he received an allowance of federal funds to buy steers from local cattle ranches to furnish the monthly beef ration allotted the reservation Chiricahuas.

Behind the combination trading post and agency headquarters was a cattle corral. An issue chute was set up across the weighing scales adjoining the corral. The steers were driven through the chute where the head of each family presented his ration ticket, had it stamped, and watched his cattle being weighed.

Colonel Richard Dandridge, as the fort C.O., was required to add his official presence to the weighing-out, but after their conference this morning, that would be a mere formality. Seething with his private bitterness, the aging career officer had been almost eagerly amenable to Creed's proposal.

For the hundredth time, Creed chuckled over the development.

It was simple. So damned simple. From now on he would buy up the poorest of the cull steers the ranches had for less than half the ordinary price, then pocket the balance of allotted money. A simple matter, also, to rig the scales so that the sorriest steer would be well within the minimum poundage allowed. One third of Creed's swindled government funds would keep Colonel Dandridge's bitter-thin mouth silent. And the Apaches, unable to subsist on gaunt, stringy, possibly diseased beef, would be forced to trade at Creed's post for supplies.

Jacob Creed took another mild swig from his flask, capped it, and put it away. He took a step off the

porch and damned near fell on his face.

Jesus. Was he that drunk?

Sure he was.

Why had he made the deal with Dandridge? Sold whatever dregs of gentle birthright he could still lay claim to for a mess of conspiratorial pottage?

Then, reflecting on Sarah and the miserable course his life with her had taken, he thought: *Why should I give a damn?*

He straightened upright and lurched homeward along the sandy, thin-worn path to the agency house beyond the fort, considering (as he often did) ways in which he could repay her treatment of him.

Creed grinned crookedly. There was one sure-as-hell way. . . .

Even the most incorruptible man, when all his hopes and ideals have been repeatedly dashed by adverse fortune, may become approachable. . . .

"Damn the fellow's complacency!" Major Casement cut disgustedly into his subordinate's reading. "Did he fancy that *his* reason was any better or different from that of the man he bribed?"

Mayberly raised his brows. "Probably not, sir. I think it was Creed's wry, oblique way of telling himself as much. As I suggested earlier, his difficulty with his wife must have been a powerful goad behind all his actions."

"Mm." Casement rolled the cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. "Powerful enough to drive him to murder. Go on, Mr. Mayberly."

Again the lieutenant flipped back through the pages. "I think, in light of subsequent developments, that this entry is a revealing one, sir. It was made on the day Creed arrived with his wife on the stage from Silverton to take over duties at the San Lazaro Agency."

***

March 12, 1886

The conditions at our new post are not nearly as desolate as we had feared. The reservation itself is situated at a considerable height above the desert lowland to the south, to which much of the reservation land forms a striking contrast. Numerous stands of giant pine lend a cool and indeed attractive aspect to our new home, although they are interspersed with terraced open flats which, I am told, have defied the sorry efforts of my reservation wards to farm them. As if we could, in a brief decade or so, transform a race of nomadic warriors, barely subdued by us, into tillers of the soil!

The agency house itself is a gratifying surprise to us. I do not know what we expected to dwell in—perhaps an oversized hut of baked adobe. However, the agent who preceded me at this post was James Montoya, a man—I was told—of pure Spanish descent and a true aristocrat. Clearly he chose to build after the fashion of his hidalgo forebears, and with all the splendid pine roundabout, found no need to build of stone or mud.

The squared giant timbers that compose both the inner and outer walls were hand-shaped by adze and drawknife, fitted so beautifully together that one can hardly slide a knife blade between them, and the tiers of logs are fastened at all ends and corners with vertical iron rods. It must have cost him a pretty penny to import the highly skilled labor necessary to put up such an edifice. Most of the furnishings went with Montoya when he departed, but what remains indicates that they were opulent and costly. I was told, however, that his people have money. Of course the raw timber was free for the taking, and the rough labor (Indians and mestizos, no doubt) to cut the trees and trim the logs and transport them to the spot could be hired cheaply.

Salud, Don Jaime: Your family must have been a large one. (As is more often the case than not, of course, with these Papists.) There are no fewer than a dozen spacious rooms, including six chambers on the second floor—three to a side with a hallway dividing them. Of particular interest are the two wide central balconies with their wrought-iron grillwork railings. Built off the center rooms on either second-story side of the house, one faces north, the other south. Thus, I should imagine, an occupant might enjoy sun or shade on almost any day, according to his preference.

Even Sarah seems delighted with the house and its piney surroundings, and she is particularly taken with those charming balconies. Could this herald a change for the better in the steady dissolution of our married life? One can only hope. . . .

"Here's his diary entry for June 4. It reads simply, 'Damn Sarah—damn her soul to eternal hell. Last night—'"

"Obviously, it didn't." Major Casement plumped himself back into his chair, folding his hands over his paunch. "Eh?"

"No, sir." Mayberly turned a block of pages, going forward in the journal now. "Here's his entry for June 4. It reads simply, 'Damn

Sarah—damn her soul to eternal hell. Last night—' "

"That's all?"

Mayberly nodded. "His temper reached such a passion that his pen nib slashed through the paper at that point, and a scattering of ink blots suggests that he flung the pen down in a rage. Whatever provoked the outburst apparently occurred on the previous day or evening. From the shakiness of the writing, I should say he was barely recovered from a monumental debauch."

Major Casement unlaced his fingers, tapping them on his paunch. "No entry for that date . . . April 3?"

"None, sir. The journal is full of gaps and omissions—for our purpose, at least. We can only speculate on the missing parts. My inquiries among our own garrison personnel turned up a few things that may help fill in the picture."

"Such as?"

"Well, it seems that Mrs. Creed *did* take a hankering to those second-floor balconies. She loved to sit of an afternoon on the one that faces north—on the side toward the fort."

"Is that where . . .?"

"Yes, sir. Where Creed fell through the nailed-shut door."

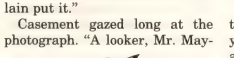
Major Casement frowned. "I haven't paid a lot of notice to the agency house, but I'd assumed that it was a boarded-up window he went through. So there *was* a balcony there?"

"Until Creed had it torn off, sir. Lieutenant Verlain's wife told me that Mrs. Creed preferred the north balcony because it was cool and shaded in the afternoon. She was careful never to expose her creamy complexion, of which she was very proud, to the sun for any great time. In any event, she would sit out and read or else let down her hair and brush it, a lengthy ritual." Lieutenant Mayberly cleared his throat. "Seems that some of our chaps at the fort—both officers and enlisted men—would get out field glasses and watch her from the barracks windows. It became a daily piece of business hereabouts."

"Did it, now!"

"Sir, there's something mighty provocative in the sight of a beautiful woman brushing out her hair." Mayberly reached in his dispatch case and took out a photograph, which he handed across the desk. "That is Mrs. Creed. A picture I found in her husband's effects. Mrs. Verlain verifies it is a recent one. You can't tell from this, of course, but her hair was very long and shining—like a waterfall of reddish gold, Mrs. Verlain put it."

Casement gazed long at the photograph. "A looker, Mr. Mayberly. A looker, all right. Creed had reason to be jealous, if that is why he had the balcony removed."



"You can't tell from this, of course, but Sarah's hair was very long and shining—like a waterfall of reddish gold."

"That's why, sir. And he had the door that opened out on it nailed shut. For a while after that, Mrs. Verlain claims, Mrs. Creed had recourse to the south balcony, holding a parasol against the scorching sun. But it was awkward and uncomfortable, and she soon abandoned the practice."

***

(June 3, 1886)

Creed sat in the deepening shadows of his sutler's store, drinking and brooding. He was coatless, his single badge of dignity removed, and his shirtsleeves were rolled up. Now and then he hooked his thumb into the ear of a whiskey jug, tilted it on a thick, hairy forearm, put it to his lips and drank deeply, afterward wiping his mouth on the back of his other forearm. He was not drinking idly. He was drinking to get deeply and sullenly drunk.

Damn the woman. He'd never used to drink like this.

Where had it started? When?

Ten years ago and in Washington City, he supposed muddily, if you wanted to go back that long and far. To the beginning of a marriage. It had seemed an ideal match, everyone agreed. He was the young scion of an old New York family, and as the personal secretary of a U.S. Senator, privy to secrets at the very pulse of power, destined for great things. She was the senator's lovely socialite daughter, and they were thrown often and naturally into company.

The engagement had been as brief as propriety allowed, the wedding lavish and festive, and the aftermath stained with acid. Sarah's ideas of perfect marriage were gleaned from the purported precepts of Queen Victoria, discreet advice in *Godey's Lady's Book,* and murky tidbits from her mother ("A woman must learn *submission* to her husband, my dear, no matter how demanding he may seem."). All of this, along with too much festive champagne, had Sarah in a mildly hysterical state by the end of their wedding day. And Creed remembered his nuptial night vividly. The words she had screamed at him: "Oh my God, I never dreamed . . . *you hairy beast!*"

Words that still cut his memory

like blades. Where could a marriage go from there except downhill?

Sarah had soon learned the submission that her mother had recommended. It was all that was required of her and all that she damned well intended to give. Not bad if a man could pleasure himself by embracing a waxen statue, but Creed had taken his pleasures elsewhere. Along with a concomitant erosion not only of his married life but of his career in government service.

The pit of his descending fortunes had been reached two years ago, with his appointment as agent to the tiny blister patch of a Jicarillo reservation south of here. Granted, his new assignment to the big San Lazaro Reservation was a step back up. But then, once you'd reached the lowest rung on a ladder, where could you go?

You could fall off it on your face,

"I didn't know those men at the fort were spying on me," Sarah said. "Please...I love that balcony!"

Creed thought with the humor of stark misery, and took another pull at the jug, draining it.

A trapped fly had been batting monotonously against the window beside his head. Suddenly furious, Creed took a backhand swipe at it with his right hand, shattering the glass.

"Dammit all to hell!"

He stared at his badly bleeding hand for a half minute, letting out a string of ripe oaths. Then, awkwardly left-handed, he bound the cut up with his handkerchief. It did little to check the bleeding. He got off the petulant jag end of his temper by smashing the empty jug on the packed-clay floor. Then he closed up for the night, not bothering to lock the door, and maneuvered foggily across the parade ground. Mulrooney, Troop L's bugler, gave him a bad start by suddenly sounding tattoo just a few yards away. Creed was barely sensible enough to curb his impulse to call the bull-chested Mulrooney a few well-chosen names.

He wove his way home along the narrow trail, barged into the agency house, tramped through the front and back parlors and into the kitchen, bawling, *"Sarah!"*

"You needn't shout. But as pixilated as you are, I suppose you wouldn't know the difference."

Creed hauled up in the doorway, glaring at her. Sarah was seated at the small kitchen table, picking at a plate of leftover chicken and biscuits. She gave him a radiant, meaningless smile and nibbled daintily at a biscuit.

"Where's my supper, dammit!?"

"You've already drunk it, haven't you?"

Creed started to lurch forward, but the whiskey had caught up to him with a vengeance. He had to grab at the doorjamb for support. "Dammit."

"Don't tax your vocabulary, dear. If you have anything to tell me, you might be more at home, not to say lucid, with words of one syllable. Certainly not three."

Oh, Christ.

Creed dropped his hot forehead against his bent forearm, braced against the doorjamb.

Ever since I had the damned balcony torn off! Up till then, at least, they had always been tolerably polite, if cool, toward each other. He remembered her outraged cry as Miguel Ortiz, the local handyman he'd hired to demolish the balcony, had begun his work.

"Please don't, Jacob! I didn't know those men at the fort were—were spying on me. You can't blame me! Please . . . I love that balcony!"

Creed had felt a grim satisfaction in ignoring her plea. It was something to have finally broken through her cool and regal facade. All the years of his philandering and her silent knowledge of it had never touched a nerve. At least not so it showed. Now she was wringing her hands, pleading, driven literally to tears. And he'd grinned at her, unspeaking, while they'd listened to the shriek of pulled nails and the wrenching of boards as the destruction went on.

Afterward Sarah had locked herself in her room. Locked her door against him for the first time. Next morning when he'd come down to breakfast, Sarah was composed and calm-eyed, even humming a little, as she set out a meal for herself alone. When he'd angrily asked where his breakfast was, she'd given him a gentle smile and said nothing as she began to eat.

It was pretty much how things had gone ever since. They never took their meals together. If Sarah chanced to fix more than she felt like eating, she'd leave the remainder on a plate for him. By the time he got home, it would be cold and marbled with grease—a more pointed sign of her contempt than when she left nothing at all for him. Always a meticulous housekeeper, she now abandoned any pretense at housekeeping, except for keeping her own bedchamber tidy and washing her own clothes and sheets. Creed abhorred the notion of lowering himself to housework. Although he knew he'd be giving the garrison gossips a field day, he

hired Dolores Ortiz, Miguel's wife, to clean the place once a week, wash the stacks of dirty dishes, and launder his clothes and bedding.

Creed raised his head and stared at Sarah. She patted her lips with a napkin and rose to her feet. Lamplight ran a silken caress over the red-gold corona of her hair. Smiling faintly, she said: "Do try to be less casual, dear. Your hand is dripping all over the floor."

Somehow it tripped off the last cinch on Creed's temper. In all their years together, however angry and frustrated he'd become, he had never laid a violent hand on her.

Suddenly now, red rage sizzled in his brain. It was uncontrollable. With a throaty growl he surged forward, gripped the edge of the table between them in both hands, and flung it aside. It caromed against the wall with a crash of shattering dishes.

As easily as if she'd been expecting this, Sarah slipped around and past him, graceful as a wraith. She paused in the doorway and gave a soft, taunting laugh.

"Temper, Jake. Is that any way for a petty household tyrant to behave?"

Creed swung wildly around and after her. Sarah glided away, going through the back parlor and up the oak-balustraded staircase.

Creed's vision began to fuzz away as he stumblingly reached the staircase. Then everything tilted crazily in his sight. He wasn't aware of falling, but suddenly his chin crashed against the third riser from the bottom.

Befuddledly he lifted his head, waggling it back and forth, tasting blood. He felt no pain, but knew he had bitten through his tongue. Above him, Sarah stood at the head of the stairs. He had never seen a smile so radiant.

"Sweet dreams, Jacob. You'll have them exactly where you're lying now, I suspect. *Sic semper tyrannis.*"

She blew him a kiss and vanished into the upstairs hallway. Creed's head dropped; his chin hit the riser again. The three inside bolts on Sarah's door shot loudly, crisply into place as she secured them. Those were the last sounds Jacob Creed heard before he passed out.

June 7, 1886

I have done the deed.

After several days of mulling over what further indignities I might inflict on that ivory-skinned bitch, I came to the conclusion that there were none. She was now armored in her mind against whatever I might do. There was no recourse left me but the final one. The most final of all.

The longer I mulled on how pleasant it would be to take that cool white throat between my hands and crush it to jelly, the more forcefully the idea seized me. Sarah must die. And no way of encompassing her end could be more gratifying.

Yesterday I did not drink at all. I had to be as keen and cold as steel to perpetrate the deed. I had to make no mistake, leave no sign that might be traced to me. My only fear was that without the crutch of strong drink, my determination might waver at the last moment.

It did not.

I returned home at an early hour to be sure of arriving before she might retire behind the locked door of her chamber. I found her at supper. I throttled her in the midst of one of her tart and supercilious remarks.

God, but it felt wonderful. I could feel the strength coursing through my body into my hands, increasing momentarily, as I watched her face purple into death.

She scratched my hands rather badly, trying to tear them from her throat, but that is a trifle. The marks will soon heal. Let anyone, should I be suspect, prove how I came by them.

The three inside bolts on Sarah's door shot into place. These were the last sounds Jacob Creed heard before he passed out.

Making sure the body will never be found presented no great difficulty. I had already weighed the matter carefully. There was a place ideal for my purpose. Not five hundred yards east of the agency house was a deep arroyo lined with cutbanks of crumbling rock. At one spot was an overhang of massive rubble that, with a little assistance, would collapse in a slide of rocks so heavy that no flash flood would ever undermine them.

Accordingly, well after taps sounded, I left the agency house with the body across my shoulders, clinging to deep shadows against the light of a quarter moon. I laid her out (with hands folded on her bosom; peace be to her shade!) at the bottom of the arroyo beneath the cutbank. Ascending it, I struggled to pry loose a key rock that I was certain, if dislodged, would bring the whole mass of rubble crashing down.

It was quickly done and the evidence of my deed buried forever. The pile of tumbled boulders looks

as if it might have been thus for a thousand years.

"The devil," muttered Major Casement. "And the story he gave out was that his wife simply . . . disappeared."

"Yes, sir," said Mayberly. "No elaborate cover story. He was supremely confident. What was there that might prove otherwise?"

Casement shook his head slowly. "But to record the act with all incriminating detail in that journal. He *must* have been mad!"

"Well, sir, I've read that a madman may try to collect his scattered thoughts by writing them down. Of course, he had the journal well concealed and had no reason to believe anyone would see it while he still lived—in which assumption he was correct. I spent most of a day searching the agency house for clues, for evidence of any sort, before I located this volume. It was in a hidden compartment at the base of an armoire in his room."

"And it enabled you to look for—and find—the remains of Mrs. Creed."

"Yes, sir. I had only the vague description he gives of her to go on. As Creed mentions, there was nothing but tumbled rock to indicate the site, and that could describe almost any spot the length of the arroyo, which is a quarter mile long, more or less. So I enlisted the aid of our garrison's chief scout, Joe Tana. He is full-blood Pima."

"Mm. One of those fellows could pick up sign on the burned-out lid of hell. Which," the major added sourly, "a good piece of this country comes near to being. Go on."

"Lord knows how Joe Tana found the place, but he did. Then I assigned a half dozen of our troopers to dig through the rubble. After a couple hours of wrestling giant boulders away, they uncovered the body."

"I have written a full account of our 'arrangement' anent the misappropriated government funds for the Apache beef ration."

"It was identifiable?"

"Just barely, sir. The fall of rock had crushed it beyond facial or physical recognition. And it had been there for well over a month. Only the clothing gave indication of sex." Mayberly paused, looking down at the journal. "The only sure identification was the hair that both her husband's journal and Mrs. Verlain describe so . . . vividly."

" 'Like a waterfall of reddish gold'?"

"Yes, sir. You can't imagine . . ."

Major Casement grimaced. "Unfortunately, I can. Go on, Mr. Mayberly."

"His entry for the following day records his first seeing the apparition of his wife." Mayberly flipped a few more pages. "Then a week later, this:

June 15, 1886

Came to an understanding with Colonel Dandridge today. Following Sarah's disappearance, which I duly reported, he ordered patrols out to search for her. When they turned up not a trace, he was inclined to feel that I knew more than I had divulged and bluntly told me so. Wherefore I told him just as bluntly that I have written a full account of our "arrangement" anent the misappropriated government funds for the Apache beef ration and sent it under seal to my attorney in a city I did not name, with instructions that it be opened in the event of my death. I could as easily add a proviso that if I were to suffer imprisonment or detainment, or be held incommunicado in any way, it should be opened. In that case I would have nothing to lose, Dandridge everything.

Major Casement lifted a quizzical brow. "Was there such a statement?"

Mayberly shrugged. "Apparently Colonel Dandridge believes so, as there's nothing to indicate that he took any action then or later. However, Creed has been dead for weeks, the news widely published, and no attorney, no claimant to his estate, has come forward. I've found no will and no mention of any living relative."

Casement sighed. "Then?"

"All the entries for several weeks thereafter—when he troubled to make them—deal with mundane, everyday matters. As through he had casually laid aside the very memory of his wife. Then—" Mayberly turned a section of pages to another marked place. "We come suddenly to the following:

July 20, 1886

The gradual cessation of heavy drinking has done wonders for the well-being of my mind and body. Indeed, my sexual vigor is far greater than it has been in years! Not only is this manifest in the state of my flesh, but my attention to comely females has intensified, at times almost to a frenzy I cannot control.

A liaison with one of the women of the fort, the wife or daughter of an officer or enlisted man, even if it could be managed, would be both

difficult and dangerous to undertake. It is out of the question. Nor am I inclined, any longer, to cajole and flatter even a willing female. I shall never again make the least obeisance to gain the favor of any of them.

Another solution to my need has formed itself in my mind. I have examined it from every side and see no reason why it cannot be accomplished. In fact, I shall implement it this very day.

Creed squatted on his hunkers in front of the brush wickiup of Sal Juan, a leading headman of the San Lazaro Apaches. Facing him in a similar crouch, Sal Juan was a wolf-gaunt man whose barrel chest strained his calico shirt. His clean, shoulder-length hair was streaked with gray, but the lines graven in his mahogany face told more of harsh living than of age.

Sal Juan's eyes were like obsidian chips and they smoldered with hatred. He had reason to hate, as Creed was unconcernedly aware, and he knew that a few short years ago Sal Juan—one of the fiercest of Apache war chiefs—would have killed him without hesitation for what he had just proposed. But Sal Juan's war-trailing days were past. He had surrendered to the *pinda-likoyes*, the white-eyes, so that the pitiful remnant of his half-starved band might be spared a final annihilation.

Presently he lowered his eyes, scooped up a handful of dirt, and juggled it in his palm. "What will *Nantan* Creed give to take the daughter of Sal Juan as wife?"

"Horses. Goods." His years on the Jicarillo reservation had given Creed an easy command of the slush-mouthed Apache tongue. "What do you ask?"

Sal Juan raised his hate-filled eyes. "This thing you know as well as I."

"Cattle."

"Fat cattle. For all the people of the *Be-don-ko-he*. From this time forward we will have fat cattle."

Creed dipped his head solemnly. "Fat cattle for all the people of the Chiricahua from this time forward. It will be as Sal Juan says."

Dandridge wouldn't go for his reneging on their bargain, he knew amusedly. But he wouldn't lift a damned finger to prevent it, either. He couldn't threaten Jacob Creed with anything that Creed couldn't turn against him just as effectively. Not while he believed that a certain incriminating statement was in the possession of Creed's attorney.

What attorney? Creed laughed silently at the thought. Sal Juan again bent his head, his face a stone mask. Creed squatted patiently, letting him have all the time he wanted.

Creed shuttled his gaze past the man to the girl. She was crouched on her heels grinding corn in a stone *metate* and her slim figure was lost in her shapeless camp dress.

But on other visits here he'd seen her moving about at one chore or another, walking graceful as a young willow, the lissome outlines of her body showing through the dress, letting you visualize all her tawny loveliness: gold-skinned, sweet-curving, secret-hollowed. Sweet sixteen and bursting with the just-ripened juices of her youth.

God. Just thinking of her was enough to make his mouth go dry, his hands grow moist. This close, even seeing her ungracefully squatted at her squaw's work, set up a wild thunder in his blood.

"Sons-ee-ah-ray is a good daughter," Sal Juan said presently. "She is strong and works hard. She will breed strong sons."

Creed inclined his chin appreciatively. "This thing I believe."

"A young man called Gian-nah-tah has tied his pony before my lodge."

"Has the daughter of Sal Juan taken it to water?"

"Yes. It is her will."

"And Sal Juan's will? How many ponies can the young man give him?"

He held up all the fingers of one hand.

Creed spread the fingers of both hands. "I will give Sal Juan this number of ponies."

Supplementing Apache words with an English number, Sal Juan said flatly: "*Nantan* Creed will give seven times that number."

"Three times."

"Six times that number."

"Five times."

"Four."

"No. Five times that number."

Apache life was colored with superstitions. Signs and omens dictated the Apache's choices and actions.

Creed nodded. "Five times that number and fat cattle for all the Be-don-ko-he from this time forward. It is done?"

Sal Juan was silent. The gift of ponies weighed far less with him, Creed knew, than the welfare of his band. The burden of leadership outweighed even his hatred of Creed. Yet he hesitated.

Creed repeated, "It is done?"

"There is the chief of pony soldiers."

Creed let his beard part in a slow smile. "I tell you what, old

"The white-eyes walks with a ghost," Skin-ya repeated imperturbably. "The cheden of a woman."

man," he said in English. "You just leave *Nantan* Dandridge to me, all right?"

"You, him," Sal Juan said in the same language. "You both the same. I spit on you."

Still smiling, Creed said mildly, "Uh-uh. No, you won't. You think your folks have had it bad up till now? You've hardly seen the start of how bad I can make it."

Sal Juan made a fist around the handful of dirt.

Creed said patiently, "It is done?"

Sal Juan did not reply. Something else was troubling him, Creed realized. Giving up a hard-working daughter? Creed doubted it. Sal Juan had his share of women: two wives and a couple more unmarried daughters, neither of them a looker. But Apache standards of beauty were different from whites', and Sal Juan could easily spare one daughter.

"I have wealth," said Creed. "The daughter of Sal Juan will be treated well."

"It is another thing." Abruptly Sal Juan rose to his stocky height. "We will speak with Skin-ya."

Creed got up, too, hiding his irritation. Skin-ya, that dried-up old buzzard bait! But Apache life was colored with superstitions of every hue. Signs and omens dictated the Apache's choices and actions. Nothing important was undertaken against the wishes of the prevailing spirits. These spoke most trenchantly through the *izze-nantan*, the man of medicine. So Skin-ya, the local crucible of mumbo-jumbo, must be consulted.

As he and Sal Juan passed through the village, drowsing in the midday sun, Creed held the girl hungrily in his mind's eye. Sons-ee-ah-ray. *Morning Star.* That's what the name meant and that's what he'd call her. He thought of the consternation he'd cause among the white contingent at the fort by taking a bride so soon after Sarah's disappearance. *An Indian bride!* The thought pleased him so much that he nearly laughed aloud.

As to the promise of a fair cattle issue he'd given Sal Juan, he would keep it for a while. As long as it suited him or as long as it proved convenient. You could never tell. The girl was a good worker; she'd fix his meals and keep that rat's nest of an agency house cleaned up. But she might go all to suet in a few years, the way a lot of these Indian women did. In that case. . . .

They found Skin-ya seated cross-legged before his wickiup, head bent in meditation. Naked save for a breechcloth, his wrinkled hide dyed to the neutral color of the arid land that had sustained him for eighty summers or more, he did not look up as the two men hunkered down facing him. He seemed in a trance. At last, slowly, he raised his eyes. They sparkled blackly in his shriveled mummy's face.

"Sal Juan," he husked, "would know the will of the *chedens* in the matter of his daughter's marriage."

Creed stared. "How did you—?"

Sal Juan cut him off with a chopping motion of his hand. "Will Skin-ya make the medicine?"

Skin-ya fumbled inside a buckskin bag and took out the accoutrements of his craft, spreading them on the ground. A fragment of lightning-riven wood, a root, a stone, a bit of turquoise, a glass bead, and a small square of buckskin painted with cabalistic symbols. He sprinkled them with *hoddentin,* the sacred powder ground from maguey. He sprinkled *hoddentin* on himself, on Creed, on Sal Juan; he scattered *hoddentin* to the four winds.

The ancient shaman sat in silence for a long time, eyes closed. He opened them suddenly, eyeing Creed. "There is a smell of *tats-an* about the *pinda-likoye.* Also, he walks with a ghost."

Sal Juan said, "What of Sons-ee-ah-ray?"

"Would Sal Juan wed his daughter to one who is *tats-an?"*

"I am alive," Creed said harshly.

"Soon you will be *tats-an.* You will not be present."

Jesus. These siwashes had such a damned polite of way of saying you'd be dead before long. *"How?"* he spat.

Skin-ya struck his own neck sharply with the edge of his palm and let his head hang grotesquely to one side.

"You lie," Creed said coldly.

"The white-eyes walks with a ghost," Skin-ya repeated imperturbably. "The *cheden* of a woman."

He raised a scrawny arm and pointed.

Sarah stood on a barren rise not thirty feet away. Heat danced on the flinty slope and he could see its shimmering waves *through* her body; they made it shimmer and waver, too.

She smiled and beckoned to him.

With a hoarse cry he lunged to his feet and stumbled toward the rise and up it. The loose soil cascaded away under his driving feet and sent him plunging on his belly. He lay unmoving and

stared. Before his eyes the smiling form slowly faded and then was gone.

Sarah. Then I did not imagine the other time. But that was on the day after the night I killed her, well over a month ago. Why has she come back? What does she . . .

"Balderdash!"

Major Casement's cigar had gone out some time ago. He took the wet stub from his mouth and eyed it distastefully. "You've questioned these Apaches, of course?"

Lieutenant Mayberly nodded soberly. "Sal Juan says he saw nothing. But he believes Skin-ya and Creed did."

Casement snorted. "And I suppose the old charlatan *insists* he did?"

"Well—" Mayberly nodded at the photograph of Sarah Creed on the commandant's desk. "I showed that to Skin-ya and asked if he had ever seen the woman. He said that was *her*—the ghost that walked with Creed."

"Preposterous! Do *you*—?"

"Sir, I've merely reported what I was able to find out."

"All right—all right!"

"There's a little more. For the next day. His last entry."

"Very well." The major gestured resignedly with his cigar stub. "Get it over with, Mister."

July 21, 1886

After yesterday's experience in the village, I had no taste for returning home. I dreaded the prospect. What might I now encounter in the very house where I killed her?

I cannot doubt that I actually saw the abomination, for Skin-ya saw it first and directed my attention to it. Badly shaken, I returned to my store and steeped myself to the eyebrows in booze. It gave me the courage to return to the house where, in drunken hallucination, I might easily have seen the apparition again.

But I did not.

I have only the vaguest memory of getting out my journal and recording my second entry of the day, a lengthy and rambling one to be sure. Now, looking back over what I wrote at the time, I have tried to determine how much of it is fact, how much of it fancy.

I can no longer tell. My thoughts are too confounded.

Tonight I must not drink. I must go home cold and clear of head and confront whatever is there, surely and finally. I know something is there. But I must have the truth—

Creed scribbled the last words with an impatient flourish. He was standing at a long counter of his sutler's store, the journal spread open before him. For a moment, pen poised in hand, he glanced over what he had just written. By now it was dark enough so that he had to squint to make it out.

What more was there to say?

Impatiently he thrust the pen back in the inkstand, closed the journal, and thrust it into his coat pocket. Then he skirted the counter and headed for the door, preparatory to locking up.

Creed paused. A sly tongue of thirst licked at his belly.

Liquid courage. Why not? He could use some. He turned quickly back to the counter, reached under it, and pulled out a bottle of Old Crow. The best. Saved for a notable occasion. Perhaps now.

No, dammit!

Resolutely he stowed the bottle back out of sight. It was a time of reckoning. He had to be certain. No false courage. And no drink-inspired delusions.

Creed locked the door behind him and tramped hurriedly across Fort Bloodworth's parade ground. It was long after tattoo; all lights were out. The path to the agency house was paved by moonglow. Creed kept his head bent, not looking at the dark masses of brush to either side, as though he feared what he might see.

Is it all a damned trick? Couldn't it be a trick of some kind?

Those Apaches hated his guts. They'd like to see him dead—Sal Juan most of all. Suppose that Sal Juan and that shrunken bag of bones, Skin-ya, had rigged all this between them. Mesmerized him into thinking he was seeing something that wasn't? Planted a fear in his mind that might trip him to his doom?

That was it, sure. A lot of hocus-pocus.

The only trouble was, he didn't believe a dust mote of his own rationale.

The house loomed ahead, a flat black oblong against a cobalt sky.

Creed advanced into the hallway. It smelled musty and unused, like an exhalation from the tomb.

Creed's steps slowed. But he had to go in. Had to face whatever was there.

He opened the front door and left it open to the stream of moonlight as he crossed the room to a lowboy, where a lamp reposed. He lifted the lamp's chimney, struck a match, shook it free of a sulfurous flare of sparks, and touched it to the wick.

Suddenly the door slammed shut.

Creed started and wheeled around. The tiny spoon of lamp flame faintly picked out familiar objects of the room. Nothing else.

No wind at all. No draft. Why should the door . . .?

Now the lampflame was guttering in the sudden stir of air from the slamming door. Heart pounding wildly, Creed cupped his hands around it, cherishing the flame. God, if it went out! If he were isolated in total darkness. . . .

The flame held and became steady again. Carefully he replaced the chimney and turned the lamp up high. Carrying it with him, treading with a slow care, he walked from the front parlor to the back one, where the staircase was.

Creed halted at the bottom step. The lower risers were picked out in a waver of shadow and saffron light, but the top of the stairs was lost in darkness. He sleeved away the cold sweat from his forehead. He started up the stairs, making his feet move independently of the congealed fear in his brain and belly.

It is up there. God. It's waiting. I can run from it, but it will still be with me. It will always be with me. I must face it out now, or . . . Go on, dammit! Don't think about it. Just go on—

He reached the top of the stairs and advanced into the hallway. It smelled musty and unused, like an exhalation from the tomb. He came to the door of his room, a central one whose one window faced south, along with a door that opened on the still-intact south balcony.

Creed opened the door, peered cautiously about, and went in. He set his lamp on the commode and crossed the room to the armoire. Squatting down, he slid back a small panel at its base, exposing the hidden compartment. He took the journal from his pocket, placed it in the compartment, and pushed the panel back into place.

"Ja-cob . . ."

The murmurous whisper froze him where he was, crouched on his heels. Creed did not want to look around. The blood thudded sickly in his temples. And then he looked.

She stood in the open doorway, appearing as real as if she were still flesh. Creamy flesh. Tinted as if the rich blood of life still pulsed beneath it.

The smile formed; the arm raised and beckoned.

Creed let out a mad roar. He surged at her, his hands lifting to grasp and crush. He plunged through her as if she were smoke. Momentum carried him on through the doorway. He crashed against the closed door opposite him.

The door of Sarah's room.

He swung around, wildly. His own doorway was empty now, framed by lamplight and nothing else.

"Ja-cob . . ."

Where? He froze, straining his ears. No other sound. But he was sure. The cajoling whisper had come from behind Sarah's door.

He wrenched it open and flung it wide, the door banging against the inside wall.

She was in front of him. Smiling still, the arm beckoning. Moonlight from her one window, as well as lamplight from his back, picked her out, but more faintly now.

She was transparent. *Again.*

With a howl he dived at her, reaching and closing his hands, seizing hold of nothing at all. And when he wheeled around again, she was gone.

"Jacob. To me. Come."

Sarah's voice. Unmistakably hers. Not ghostly at all. Just words spoken in a calm, quiet tone. Yet firm and commanding.

She was standing close to the window and both her arms were outstretched now. She was not smiling anymore. Only positive.

"Damn you to all hell!"

Creed shrieked the words as he dived at her. His hurtling weight smashed against a solid wall. Almost solid.

It yawed open abruptly with a snarl of ripped-out nails, a sound of splintering wood. Jacob Creed plunged on and out into a cool rush of night air, his arms flung wide to embrace nothing.

Falling, he had one last impression: the trailing sound of a woman's laughter.

Lieutenant Mayberly closed the journal and laid it on the commandant's desk beside the photograph of Sarah Creed.

"What happened after he made that last entry, we can only surmise. When he didn't show up at his store the next day, Corporal Higgins of L Troop—who'd gone to the sutler's to purchase some tobacco—was curious enough to stroll over to the agency house and investigate. What had happened was plain. The door that opened on the north balcony—the door that had been nailed shut after Creed had ordered the balcony torn off—was split nearly in half, dangling from a single hinge. Creed's body was on the ground beneath. Obviously he had smashed through the door—"

"And died, of course," Major Casement said irritably, "as that old shaman had divined he would? Eh?"

Mayberly gave a noncommittal nod. "Incidentally, sir, he did. Yes. Of a broken neck."

"Balderdash," the major said wearily. He nudged the journal with his thumb. "For God's sake, Mr. Mayberly. I don't doubt that you've investigated this matter with your usual thoroughness and efficiency. But how in hell can I assemble a report to the department that will make any sense of it all?"

"Sir, I'd simply relate what we've been able to tell for certain.

Higgins immediately reported Creed's demise to Colonel Dandridge. I've checked Higgins's story. He says the colonel seemed apathetic, almost indifferent, to the news, and then dismissed Higgins with a disconcerting abruptness. Five minutes later, Sergeant Major Carmody, at his desk in the outer office, heard a shot. He hurried to the inner office and found the colonel slumped across his desk, his service revolver clenched in his fist. He had shot himself through the head. No doubt because revelation of his complicity with Creed in cheating on the Apache beef issue would have wiped out the last remnant of his career."

"All that is clear enough, Mr. Mayberly," snapped Casement. "What concerns me is this blather about spectral apparitions. I don't see any way to avoid alluding to it if I'm to submit a complete and truthful report on the business." He scowled, tugging at his underlip. "Suppose I can hazard a speculation that Creed was suffering from a massive delusion brought on by feelings of personal guilt or whatever . . ."

Mayberly cleared his throat. As he always did when he found something difficult to communicate, Casement thought irritably. "Out with it, Mister!" he barked.

"Perhaps you'd better see for yourself, sir." The subaltern cleared his throat again and nodded at the journal. "It's in there. The last entry."

Casement's patience was worn to an edge. "You said you'd read off the last entry in that damned thing. What—?"

"Creed's last entry, sir. But there's another one after it. See for yourself."

Major Casement picked up the journal and flipped impatiently through its pages to the end of Creed's almost indecipherable writing.

He stared at the place.

The short hairs at the back of his neck prickled; his throat felt stuffed with phlegm. He managed to clear it with a couple of mild "harrumphs," trying not to let Mayberly know that he was doing so.

"Isn't it possible, Mister, that somebody—for whatever odd reason—added this final entry later on?"

"I doubt it, sir. I found the journal in the base of Creed's armoire, his own place of concealment. The handwriting, as you can see, is crisp and clear, in a backhand script. Quite different from Creed's broad, forward-slanting scrawl. Too, as nearly as I can tell, it's a woman's hand."

"Preposterous," the major said in a fading voice.

"One more item, sir." Mayberly reached in his dispatch case, pulled out a piece of paper, and slid it across the desk. "I found this in Mrs. Creed's room. It is a letter she had begun to write to a sister in Boston, but never got to finish."

Mayberly paused, wrinkling his brow. "Don't ask me to explain *this* one, sir. I'm no handwriting expert. But I needn't be one, nor do you, to perceive that the hand which indited this letter and the one which made that final entry in Creed's journal are absolutely identical."

Major Casement stared at the letter. Then his gaze moved with a slow, dreading reluctance back to the journal spread open on his desk. To its brief and final entry:

Poor Jacob. His fancies overcame him. He fancied that he saw a ghost. Sic semper tyrannis.

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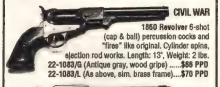

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BY
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The Girl I Left

Behind Me

In June of the year I was fifteen, we held the Fort Bannon First Annual Gymkhana. Now they say they're going to do it every year and maybe even send away to the East for prizes. I don't know anything about that. Speaking for myself, one was plenty—more than enough.

I was the one who got the whole thing started, though there's not many people know it. And just as well they don't. My father, Marcus, is the first sergeant of G Troop and knows just about everything that goes on for ten miles in any direction, but even he doesn't know that part. At least, I hope he doesn't.

The whole thing began when I went and fell in love, which was pretty dumb of me, but what can you do sometimes? Her name was Bonnie Anderson and she was the daughter of an infantry lieutenant who'd just come out from the East. She had blond hair and blue eyes and she always wore a locket you just knew had belonged to her grandmother because that's the kind of girl she was.

Not the kind of girl who was ever going to look twice at some roughneck sergeant's kid, but when you're in love you don't think about things like that.

The first time I saw her I went loping home and spent half an hour staring in the mirror—hoping, I guess, that I'd get better looking if I stood there long enough. I

didn't, no matter how many different ways I tried to grin. I just went on looking pretty much like my father, Marcus—red hair that wouldn't lie down, sort of homely in a crooked nose and too much teeth kind of way.

I borrowed some of Marc's Sunday hair tonic, but it didn't work any better on me than it does on him—it just guaranteed that everybody was going to smell me coming. Then I figured that maybe I could impress her with clothes.

That, of course, was a joke and a half. I had one plaid shirt, gone in both elbows, and one army-issue shirt that Marc had retired when it got sun-faded. When he ripped off the insignia, you could see exactly where it had been, so he tried dyeing it with some bark dye. He got the dye recipe from Sergeant Zimmer's wife, who said she got it from a Sioux woman, but I think maybe the stuff only works for women. When Marc and I tried it, it came out a color you didn't believe even while you were looking at it.

So I gave it up. If Bonnie Anderson was ever going to find that Marcus O'Hara's boy Mike was alive, it wasn't going to be his looks that would make her take notice. I found myself a deserted corner in the G Troop stable and thought about it. By afternoon stable call, I had a pretty good plan worked out.

I'm good on a horse. I have to be. If I wasn't, Marcus would probably shrivel up and die in front of the parade ground flagpole—that is, if you could imagine Marcus doing any such thing anywhere, for any reason. The next day I went riding with John Frazer and got him to race me.

Now my horse, Handy, goes a little stiff on one foreleg, so he's not terribly fast. I rode all over the saddle and took care not to help him. Of course we lost. "Just a stupid fluke," I said, pretending to be mad about it.

"Not your fault," said John. "Handy's just not what he used to be."

Any other time I'd never have let him get away with saying something like that, but right then it was just what I wanted.

"It was my fault," I said. "I was doing some awful bad riding there."

I know John Frazer pretty well. His father's a buck lieutenant in K Company and of course—all infantrymen are this way—he was crazy about horses and riding and racing. He'd even gone and shipped a big Kentucky horse out from the East.

"No horse is better than the rider he has," I said.

"It's the horse that does the running," said John.

Well, maybe you've guessed by now that we'd had this argument before. Maybe John was right and maybe he wasn't. I just know he hadn't had Marcus give him a head start and then go slamming past him as many times as I had. Make him swap horses and he'd do it again.

"You talk a lot," I said, "but will you bet on it?"

"I will for sure."

"Okay," I said, "then I'll bet you anything you like, word of honor, that I can race you point to point, from the old Indian camp down to the fort, and beat you. And you can pick the horses, yours and mine both."

"You're on," he said.

"What horses do you pick?"

"I'll let you know."

Well, I just about laughed out loud right then. John never could stand to be wrong about anything. He was out to beat me, and he was going to ask his father to lend him the Kentucky horse to do it.

And that was just what I was counting on—a crazy, impossible race that every army brat on the post would turn out to watch. And then, in front of everybody, including Bonnie Anderson, I was going to come home the winner.

I didn't think I was going to have much trouble doing it.

Point-to-point races are no holds barred. You take your own line and you get yourself across country the fastest way you can. There was an old, dried-up streambed lying part of the way from the old camp to the fort. You could go down it like lightning and cut off a good chunk of distance while you were at it. Handy's legs may not be the best, but he makes up for it with heart. Even a Kentucky-bred couldn't give him good footing and almost a furlong lead and hope to beat him.

You had to go down a ten-foot bank to get into the streambed, and that was the real beauty of the plan. Handy would take me down, but if John rode his father's horse, it wouldn't matter if he knew about the shortcut or not. That big Kentucky brute was the fastest thing you ever saw, but it wasn't about to go sliding down a dirt bank on its tail. It was a horse

John was out to beat me, and he was going to ask his father to lend him the Kentucky horse to do it.

with some very decided opinions about that kind of thing.

Do you blame me if I was grinning all to myself like a cat with a quail dinner?

That was the beginning. You'd better believe it wasn't the end. John Frazer's father was not only willing to lend the horse—he had to go meddling in and improve the whole thing.

Why just you and Mike and nobody else? he said. Why not let the rest of the boys in on it? And while we're at it, let's have a point-to-point for officers, and if we do that, we'll have to have one for enlisted men. And how about a jumping competition? There's horses here with the talent; we might just as well. . . .

Then John's little sister, who always has to mess into everything (I guess it runs in the family), came in and said he wasn't being fair to the girls, so they added an under-six ride and a pony-potato race for children and a thread-needle race and a fancy-dress ride for ladies. Mrs. Frazer said it was all perfectly charming and sure to be a wonderful success and she would start right away and make herself a costume as Mrs. George Washington.

Then she looked in on a few friends and they got up the idea of selling lemonade and cookies for the Widows and Orphans Fund. By that night they were—one at a time and all together—making life miserable for every mess sergeant on the post. Lemons aren't easy to get hold of out here, but a bunch of determined women with charity on their minds will find a way. On the day of the gymkhana there was lemonade by the bucket and by the tub.

They put the whole thing off for two weeks because the ladies wanted time to sew their costumes. The post trader was out of blue ribbon by ten the next morning and out of yellow by noon. A batch of practice hurdles grew up overnight behind the stables and the countryside was covered like an anthill with riders scouting the best routes.

The post commander thought it was a grand idea. He was an infantryman who (for a change) didn't like horses and said so, but things had been quiet for a long time. The garrison was getting restless and I guess he was glad to keep everybody amused, including the Sioux at the Agency. Some of the Indians from the Scout Corps entered for the race events, and a few of the packers got up a comedy act with the mules.

By this time my race with John Frazer was getting a little lost in the dust, so to speak. I didn't care. There were several reasons why I didn't care and every one of them was named Marcus.

It all started one day when I spotted Bonnie Anderson walking home from the trader's store. I want to tell you, she was a girl worth looking at, all gold and blue, walking through the dust and turning that into spangles of gold, too. I stood around the corner of the K Company barracks, probably with a moon-calf look on my face, and watched her, and I thought how fine a world it was just to have her in it. Oh, I was in love, I right enough was.

I had my back to the parade ground, but just then I heard some cavalry rattling up at a sharp trot. Then I heard somebody give a yelp and a holler and a very firm opinion about somebody else's talent as a soldier. Marcus, who else?

I wanted to die right there.

Now, it seems to me that the one person in the world you've got a right to be proud of is your own father, and I'd always thought Marcus was doing pretty well by me. And right then, in less than two heartbeats, it came to me how wrong I'd been.

Right then I saw Marcus the way a blue and gold girl like Bonnie was going to see him. Dusty and saddle-hard and with a patch on his trousers. Tough as they come, but dumb. The kind—I took a quick look and he was doing it right then—who'd kick his feet out of the stirrups and shove up his hat and wipe his face with the back of his hand.

I want to tell you, it was pretty awful.

That was the day—the very minute—that I started avoiding Marcus. I was desperate. After all, it was obvious—if I didn't get Bonnie to notice me before she found out Marc was my father, I might as well give up entirely.

And that was only my first problem. The second was the trick John Frazer played on me.

Just as I'd expected, he was going to ride the big Kentucky horse. I knew from the way he was grinning that he had something else up his sleeve and I was just about to get hit with it. "And you can ride Trouble," he said.

"Trouble's an I Troop horse," I said, a little too fast.

"I fixed it up," he said. "After all, you said any two horses on the post." What I was thinking—which wasn't either kind or polite—must have showed in my face because he stood and laughed at me. To him it was nothing but a joke.

"Of course," he said, enjoying himself no end, "if you'd rather not, you can take it back about letting me pick both horses. You can ride Handy and the bet's still on."

Now, if there's one thing more than another that gets the O'Haras, father and son, into trouble, it's a double helping of old-fashioned, stiff-necked stubbornness. "I'm not going to take it back," I said. "I'll ride Trouble."

I started for the I Troop stable, walking mad, with John jogging beside me. "Hey, it was a joke, Mike," he said. "I just wanted to

get your goat. I meant for you to ride Handy all along."

What he'd meant was to make me back down. "You said Trouble," I told him, "so Trouble it is."

Now, Trouble got his name the first day he set hoof in the I Troop corral and he'd spent all his time since then living up to it. His ears were laid back so permanently that he looked as if somebody had come along and glued them there. He was Private Schultz's horse, and I always wondered who in I Troop had it in for Private Schultz.

I went down to the corrals and had a look at the beast. Schultz came along while I was at it. He was a tall, skinny trooper with soft brown hair and soft, sad eyes. To look at him, you would have sworn he hadn't laughed since he got out of his cradle. You would have been wrong. He thought the idea of me riding Trouble was funny.

"Just wallop him with your hat," he said. "He'll run if you convince him hard enough." There was a deep, warm mutual feeling between Schultz and Trouble. The feeling was hatred.

"Does he stop at the other end?" I said.

"Sometimes," said Schultz. "Sometimes not." Trouble raised a hind hoof and he moved out of the line of fire. One thing you had to say for Trouble—he'd turned Schultz into the best soldier on the post. He was bucking for corporal so he could rank somebody out of a decent mount.

I rode Trouble a couple of times before the race, to get the feel of him. Once Marcus came by and looked us over and said, "Oh, isn't it the grand animal you've got there?" That's the way Marcus is. He'll lean on you until you can't stand it about tucking in your shirttail and then, on something important, he'll figure that if you got yourself in you can get yourself out.

So you can see why I wasn't looking forward to the race. When the day finally came, I just wished it was over and done.

Even so, I've got to admit it was a pretty good gymkhana. You'd never believe a little army post in the middle of Indian country could draw such a crowd. All the cavalry and infantry chaps were there, the Scout Corps and people from the town and most of the Sioux from the Agency.

All the patients in the hospital who weren't contagious came, even a few who had to be carried out by friends. Chairs had been put out for them and there was even a little wooden platform with a canvas over it on poles for the base commander and some of the older women to sit under. Most of the young wives and girls were up on their horses because the thread-needle race was going to be first.

I stood on tiptoe, trying to see Bonnie Anderson on her gray pony, but all I saw was Marcus, up on a rawboned bay horse. The horse was sidling and snorting and Marc was talking to Sergeant Van Zeller, fifty to the minute and never missing a beat. You would have thought he was sitting at home in an armchair.

I turned my back as quick as I could, but he spotted me anyway and came jogging over. He was fiddling with the biggest, ugliest bandanna you ever saw, and for an awful minute I thought he was going to blow his nose on it. All I could do was hope that Bonnie wasn't around.

"Ain't it the fine day," said Marcus sociably to me, grinning like a kid at a picnic. If there were ever two things sure to make him happy, they were a crowd of people and some good, honest competition. He looked at the bandanna as if he was wondering where it came from and finally knotted it around his neck.

"If you've got to have it," I said, "can't you at least have it where it won't show?"

"Where what won't show?"

"That thing," I said. "Why didn't you bring the white one?"

"Didn't see the white one. This one was on top," said Marcus. "What's wrong with it?"

"It looks stupid, that's what."

"I beg Your Highness's pardon," said Marcus, but he took the bandanna and stuck it down in his boot. "You better get your horse," he said, "though you understand I'm using that term a little loose."

The minute he said it, I saw what I'd done. I'd left it too late for saddling Trouble and now I was going to miss either the thread-needle race—with Bonnie herself riding in it—or a good part of the jumping competition.

I made up my mind it wasn't going to be the race. I went and pushed up as close as I could and left Marcus to think whatever he wanted.

And I'm ready to tell you, it was a beautiful race, meaning my girl won it. My girl? She didn't know I was alive and there I was, as pleased as if we'd known each other for years.

I didn't have time to enjoy it. The minute it was over, I ran for the stable. The jumping competition had done its first rounds before I got Trouble saddled and rode him back up to the parade ground. I eased in beside Private Schultz. Trouble snorted.

"He's feeling good," said Schultz. "Maybe he's going to run some for you." He gazed out over the parade ground with his usual sad look. Schultz always seemed to be expecting the worst. I think Trouble made it a habit with him.

"Schultz," I said, "would you do me a favor? Would you tell Marcus you saddled Trouble and had him all ready when I got there?"

"Sure, Mike," he said, "but why for do you want it?"

"So he won't know I didn't see him jump the first time around."

"Done real fine, too," said Schultz. "You really missed something. Only three of them still in."

"Which ones?"

"Your dad and Captain Daniels and that citizen type what's the trader's cousin or some such," said Schultz. "Fellow on the dapple gray."

I looked over and saw the gray—a big, raking animal, and no doubt about it, he was a lot of horse.

"Can't always tell by looks," I said. "A lot of good jumpers are pretty ugly." I didn't convince myself and, since Schultz had his doleful look on, I could tell I wasn't convincing him either.

At least that's what I thought until I saw Mrs. Becker's new maid girl, Essie Mae, walking past. Schultz watched her as long as he could see her. He had a look on his face just like a dachshund puppy with a stepped-on paw. I would never have believed it of him.

Captain Bent Daniels came on the course just then, riding his big, rangy buckskin. The horse bashed down two hurdles and Daniels made a face. On the way out he said something to Marcus.

"Probably gave him strict orders not to lose," said Schultz gloomily, "for whatever good it may do."

"Wouldn't matter," I said. "Marc's just naturally the kind that hates to lose." The dapple gray came in mincing like a coy dancer, the civilian-type bouncing all over the saddle. "Especially to a rotten rider like that," I said.

But never mind the rider. The horse galloped like a swallow and jumped as if he had a spring under every hoof.

"Rider's no good," said Schultz.

"Looks like he don't have to be," I said.

But it was the rider that messed it up. He got left behind on the fourth hurdle, hit the reins hard, and the gray threw up his head and knocked down a bar. He got himself together some way and took the last two fences like a bird.

"Your dad, he's going to have to do it clean," said Schultz.

"He won't," I said, and I wasn't sure if I was sorry or maybe just a little bit glad. "Look at the horse." The bay was splashed with froth and slogging on the bit and his tail was switching. Marc was just about holding him up under him, and the bay was mad about it. He wanted to go home to his stable.

I could barely believe it when they got over all but the last fence without a mistake. Even knowing Marc can get a horse to stay till hell freezes over and awhile on the ice, I didn't believe it. But when they were coming down to the last fence, I saw the bay's ears flick.

A horse is an animal that can't keep a secret. Cats keep secrets and sometimes even a dog will, but a horse never does. Learn the signs and he'll tell you everything that comes into his head. This one was beginning to wonder what the fuss was all about and why he should bother. He was thinking about refusing.

Marcus saw it, too. I don't think he even blinked, but his hands moved on the reins. If you hadn't been watching, you would have missed it. The horse jumped, big and clean, and landed—I swear—with a surprised look on his face.

Schultz yelled and G Troop was howling like banshees. And me? I yelled, too, and wondered how it is that you can be proud of somebody and ashamed of him, too, both at the same minute.

A horse is an animal that can't keep a secret. This one was beginning to wonder what all the fuss was about.

But I didn't have time to think about it much. They were calling the boys together for the race. John Frazer was there on his father's Kentucky-bred, and me on Trouble, and four others, including an Indian kid on a pinto pony. He was the son of one of the Pawnee scouts, and the pony had feathers tied in its tail and a circle of paint around one eye.

We jogged out after Lieutenant Hornsby, who was going to be the starter, with the little kids' pony-potato race going on behind us to give us time to get into position. By the time we got to the old camp, the last potato had landed in the last bucket and everybody who had a horse had ridden out to a little rise to get a better view. Even from a distance I could make out Marcus, walking his bay horse in circles. Marc has a backbone that's visible for miles.

Well, I thought, *Marc just beat that civilian horse with a lunk-headed slogger. I guess it proves it can be done.* It didn't prove I was the one to do it, but I didn't let myself think very hard about that part.

I'd made up my mind. If the only chance I had was down that bank, then sliding down the bank we'd go. I didn't care if I killed Trouble or he killed me. When Hornsby got us all in line and yelled, "Go," I went. I didn't even take the track down to the old streambed. I just hustled Trouble

I was expecting the jump. What I wasn't expecting was the good-sized buck Trouble followed it with.

over open country as fast as I could.

Just as I might have expected, Trouble skidded to a stop at the top of the bank and let me know he wanted no part of it. While we were getting this difference of opinion settled, the Indian kid shot past on the pinto, right over the edge without even a pause to think about it. The pony threw out its legs, slid down in a roil of dust, and took off at the bottom without missing a stride. I didn't begrudge it to him, it was beautiful.

And he'd also done me a favor. Trouble snorted like a donkey engine and plunged over after him.

He managed to get two-thirds of the way down before he got into bad going and I felt him scrambling to get his feet under him. He saved himself by pushing off and making a long jump to the bottom.

I was expecting the jump. What I wasn't expecting was the good-sized buck he followed it with, just to prove how outraged his feelings were. I went off, pure and classic, over the right hindquarter and, going down, I felt his hoof smack my ankle. My boot took most of it, but it was still enough to send me rolling in the dust.

So there was Trouble heading for home as if he expected a barrel of sugar in the corral and there was Michael O'Hara, great horseman, spitting dirt out of his mouth. I didn't know whether I wanted to cry or cuss or holler, so I didn't do any of them. I just got up and started walking, trying not to limp.

Down near the fort I could see that a horse and rider had detached themselves from the crowd and were coming my way at a very businesslike lope. Marcus, who else? I set my teeth and kept on walking. Up ahead of me I could hear yelling as the race finished.

Marcus galloped up and reined in. "Are you hurt at all?" he said.

"No!" I shouted.

"It was a fine spill you got yourself there."

"I'm all right," I yelled, "so you can kindly get out of here. Leave me alone. I mean it."

But Marcus only swung the horse around and said sweetly, "Will you shut your fool mouth and get up here?"

So I got up there. You don't argue with Marcus and besides, my ankle was hurting. I jumped for the horse. Marc grabbed me by the seat of the pants and hauled me on behind him.

"I think the Pawnee kid won," he said conversationally, "and why should he not? Riding like a cockleburr, he was."

"You don't need to rub it in," I said.

"I wasn't even thinking it," said Marcus, "and sorry I'm sure if I've offended you again."

"You might as well laugh," I said. "Everybody else will."

"I'm not laughing," said Marcus, and this was true. I had my arms around his waist and I could tell he was holding his breath to keep from it. "If everybody else is laughing, I guess you'll just have to let 'em."

"You can let me off by the I Troop stable," I said, trying to let him know I was still mad. "I've got to see to the horse."

But Marcus wouldn't take the bait. He let me off, not wasting any time about it. He wanted to go out and see the enlisted men's race, he said, having made a small bet with Van Zeller.

I found Trouble on the other side of the stable with Schultz walking him out. "You go see the race," I told him. "I'll do that." Schultz said that if I didn't want the horse, he'd ride him out to see the finish. He added that I didn't look in any shape to do anything. So I wandered up toward the parade ground.

I nearly walked into Bonnie Anderson. Her gray pony was cooled out and she was leading him down to the trough to water him. She smiled at me, a little shy. "I saw you ride in the race," she said.

"Saw me fall off then," I said, thinking of all the plans I'd laid to get her to notice me. I'd managed it all right.

"Well, yes," she said. "You weren't hurt, were you?"

"Not any."

"It was nice of Sergeant O'Hara to come get you."

"Why should he not?" I said, giving the whole thing up. "He's my father."

"He *is?*" she said, beaming all over her face. "Why, I thought he was just about the best rider I've ever seen, the way he won the jumping contest. You mean you're his son?"

"That's me," I said, thinking of how I'd never understand girls. "Your pony's got a cut on the mouth," I said finally. "I'll wash it off for you." I soaked my bandanna and swabbed the cut.

"I didn't even see it," she said. "Now what d'you suppose would cause a thing like that?"

"The curb chain did it," I said. The bit in the poor pony's mouth would have held an ele-

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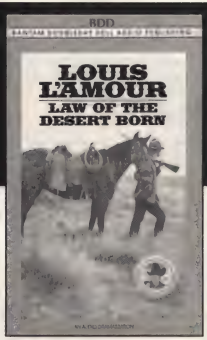

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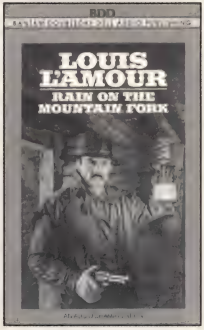

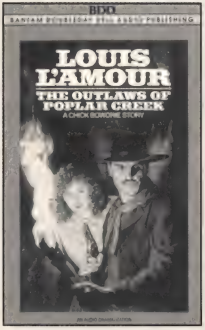

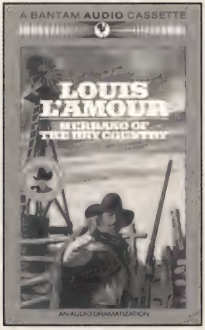

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phant—Bonnie's folks weren't about to take chances with their blue and gold girl—but it might have been all right if she'd been gentler with the reins.

I didn't feel up to telling her so. I just washed the pony's cut and fell out of love with Bonnie Anderson. A nice girl, no doubt of it, and pretty, too, but I ask you, how could I be in love with a girl with such bad hands on a horse?

"If Sergeant O'Hara's your father," she said, "would you tell him I thought it was just the most beautiful ride?"

"I'll tell him," I said.

"I bet you're just real proud of him."

"I am," I said, and I guess it was true. I was also mad at him, and I was mad at Bonnie Anderson and myself and John Frazer and Private Schultz and Trouble and all the rest of the world.

I went up toward the parade ground. The last race was just finished and people were strolling home. There were still a few little kids and ponies bumping around, left over from the potato race. I heard a couple of women talking. They were mad because there had been four Mrs. George Washingtons in the fancy dress ride and the prize had gone to somebody who said she was Mrs. Alexander the Great. Two sergeants and a corporal from the K Company mess were latching on to the leftover lemonade before anybody else thought of it.

Marcus came up to walk beside me, but I didn't speak to him and he didn't say anything either. He just got me home and sat me down by the stove and wrapped up my ankle with cold cloths.

"Y'know," he said cheerfully, "some good come of your falling off. You made Mrs. Becker's maid girl think that horse was a firebreather for sure. I tell you, she's looking at Schultz like he rode out of a book."

"Poor Schultz," I said, thinking how I wasn't in love with Bonnie Anderson anymore. Thinking how to be in love and then not in love is like a sigh of poplars and wind on the prairie—a long, sad, lost, and lonely thing, but also something of a relief.

"He'd better make corporal," said Marcus, "between the two of them."

But I had to talk about something else. "Marc," I said, "thanks for coming out and getting me."

"Why should I not?" said Marcus. "Was I supposed to leave you walking?"

"I'd have deserved it," I said. "You must've been awful ashamed of me the way I fell off."

"Can't say I was. It happens."

"But suppose you were?"

"I wasn't."

"Well, *suppose* it," I said. "You'd have come out for me anyway, wouldn't you? You'd have come out for me with the whole world watching, wouldn't you?"

"Saints in glory," said Marcus, "but where do you get it all? I suppose I would if it makes you happy."

"I might not have come for you," I said.

"I expect you would," said Marcus.

So of course I couldn't explain it to him. "You had a fine day anyway," I said, "winning the jumping and all."

"And fifty cents from Van Zeller, too."

"Marc," I said, the thought hitting me, "you didn't have a bet on *me*, did you?"

"And you riding the worst horse on the post?" said Marcus. "I ask you, do I look like a complete fool?"

But if he had, he never would have told me anyway.

Murphey and the Apache Warrior

by Ray Dorn

At dusk, Murphey drove south out of Las Vegas on the main road to southern California, dust billowing up behind his Ford flivver. Two hours later he turned off the road at the top of Mountain Pass in the Mescal Range, where Mojave Desert prospectors often gathered near a water hole. In the feeble yellow light of his headlamps he saw a dozen battered Dodge touring cars, wired-together Model Ts, and cut-down Studebaker Light Six roadsters parked randomly between clumps of cactus. Murphey switched off the engine, stepped down from the flivver, and walked toward a group of men lounging around a small campfire.

"Howdy, boys," he said.

Several men answered. Murphey hunkered down on his heels.

"Hey, Murph," the man sitting next to him said. "We were just talking about how wild and fun it must have been to prospect the Mojave in the old days."

"Shoot, boys," Murphey said. "If you want to live the Old West—the real Old West—go down into the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico. Life in them

Murphey had already made up his mind to leave the Mojave for a while, to return to Mexico.

adobe villages down there ain't changed in more'n a hundred years. There ain't no electricity, no telephones, no indoor plumbing. There sure ain't no roads. You gotta travel on horseback. And you gotta be a real man to survive there. You pack your own law on your hip because there's plenty of bandits. Even some wild Indians. I've heard about lost cities in mile-deep canyons that ain't never been explored. And buried Spanish gold—tons of it. I recall . . ."

A lean-faced man on the far side of the fire interrupted. "You talk like you been there."

Murphey didn't recognize the man. He was probably a newcomer to this part of the desert. "I was. I spent nearly a year in Sonora searching for the Tayopa treasure—sixteen tons of gold and silver the Spaniards buried three hundred years ago."

The man said, "It's clear you didn't find the treasure, else you wouldn't be driving that old wreck of a Model T."

"You're right. I didn't find the treasure. And you must be a greenhorn if you don't understand prospecting. I didn't find the gold, but I had me one hell of a time looking for it."

The man said, "What about the women? Did you cuddle up to any of them when you were in Mexico?" The man nudged his neighbor with an elbow.

Murphey squinted to see across the flames. "You leave them village women alone if you want to stay alive."

"You do a lot of talking," the man on the far side of the fire said. "If you like living in the Old West so much, why don't you go back to Mexico? Me? When I hit town after being out here in the desert, I like a long shower, a steak that's two inches thick, and a bed with clean sheets and no sand. And I like snuggling up to a town girl in the back row of one of them talking movie shows."

Murphey smiled. He was sometimes guilty of stretching facts a mite just to make a story interesting. Once in a while some smart aleck had made him eat crow in front of the other prospectors, like the far-side man thought he was doing now. But the far-side man didn't know that Murphey had already made up his mind to leave the Mojave for a while, to return to Mexico.

"Fact of the matter is," he said, "I got me a hankering to go back to Mexico, where there ain't so many city slickers around to tell a man when he's gotta blow his nose. Maybe this time I'll find me that treasure. I'm heading south tomorrow."

The men around the fire looked toward the far-side man and chuckled. Murphey chuckled with them.

The following day, Murphey tossed his blanket roll and prospecting tools in the back of the flivver and rattled over into Arizona, then turned south to the Mexican border at Nogales. Before crossing the line early the next morning, he buried his rifle and pistol in the blanket roll. No use causing unnecessary problems for Mexican customs officials, who were sometimes touchy about Americans taking guns into Mexico. Once clear of the officials he drove with care along the narrow streets of the border town, which were crowded with cars, trucks, cowboys on horseback, small boys leading burros, and makeshift wagons pulled by gaunt-ribbed horses. The prospector breathed deeply the smell of Mexico—burning charcoal; auto fumes; fruit and vegetables and raw meat all ripening under a hot sun in an open market; the pungent odor of dried animal manure mixed with a faint aroma of urine.

Beyond the town he pushed the flivver up to twenty-five miles an hour on a dirt road where old men with shovels and wheelbarrows labored under a hot sun to fill chuckholes. He arrived in Hermosillo, the state capital, at noon. In the central market he bought a large papaya, a pineapple, a cluster of little Mexican bananas, and a pair of Sonora spurs. The steel spurs had rowels larger than silver dollars. He topped off the gas tank and filled extra five-gallon cans with fuel. At the edge of the city he turned east from the main road to follow wagon tracks toward Sierra Madre, which he knew lay hidden beyond 150 miles of desert ridges and deep canyons. Three days later, worn from patching flat tires and fighting the wooden steering wheel, he came at last to a crumbling adobe village that crouched in a valley beneath the towering front range of the Sierra Madre.

In the village he traded the flivver for a smooth-mouthed bay mare, a mule that was head shy, a saddle with stirrup leathers too short for his long legs, a Mexican pack saddle called an *aparejo*—a contrary leather affair that normally takes two men to pack—and a few silver pesos.

Four weeks later Murphey knew he was in trouble. His can-

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The Apache swung the rifle to his shoulder and sighted along the barrel at Murphey.

teens were dry and the pack mule and horse were dead. They had gotten hold of some poison weed. The prospector checked his map, strapped on his pistol, picked up his .30-30 Winchester, and started on foot toward the closest village, a place down in the desert.

Murphey stumbled over a loose stone in the rock-strewn trail. He caught his balance, but not before a sharp pain slashed into his ankle.

At that moment an old Indian suddenly leaped from behind a boulder no more than twenty feet along the trail. He held a bolt action rifle ready in his hands. He was dressed like an Apache warrior from Geronimo's time: cloth headband over shoulder-length gray hair, baggy and dirty white blouse that nearly covered a breechcloth and was cinched in around the waist with a leather cartridge belt, spurs on the heels of moccasins that reached nearly to his knees.

The rifle he carried looked like an old 7-millimeter Mauser left over from the time Pancho Villa's ragtag army had swarmed over the sierras into Sonora to be defeated and routed.

The Apache pointed toward the side of the trail and shouted. His voice was sharp and commanding.

Murphey didn't catch the words. He was still boning up on Spanish vocabulary, and perhaps the Indian was speaking Apache. Was the Indian ordering Murphey to step off into the brush so he wouldn't spook cattle or horses coming up the trail? The prospector glanced down the mountainside. No. There was no dust coming up from below. Why did the Apache want him to go into the brush?

The Apache swung the rifle to his shoulder and sighted along the barrel at Murphey.

The prospector leaned his own rifle barrel against his leg and raised both hands. It seemed the proper thing to do. "Friend. I'm not looking for trouble." He struggled to remember Spanish words. "I wish only to walk down this trail to the next village."

He lowered his hands to lean heavily on the rifle and stepped forward.

The Apache screamed in anger.

Murphey's injured foot slipped sideways on a loose stone. His knee buckled and he fell to the left, landing with a jolt on the ground.

"Damn!" The word exploded from deep in his throat. He braced for the sound of the Indian's rifle.

Murphey looked up.

The Apache was gone.

Murphey limped down the face of the mountain, then followed a trail over hot sand out onto the desert. Sharp pain knifed into his left ankle with every step. More deadly was his thirst. The prospector's legs began to wobble. He knew he had to find water soon.

He heard a tinkling sound. A cowboy came riding down the middle of a dry arroyo on a small sorrel horse, steel spurs jingling on the heels of his homemade shoes.

"Hello!" Murphey called in Spanish. His voice cracked.

The cowboy reined in his horse abruptly. He was not much older than his midteens. His white shirt and pants were clean, but worn and patched. Skinny arms protruded well past the cuffs of his shirt.

"Do you have water?" Murphey asked.

The cowboy looked down at Murphey and shook his head. "No. No water." He touched a gourd canteen that hung from his saddle horn. "It is empty."

"My horse died up on the mountain. I am attempting to travel to the closest village. Does this trail go to a village?"

The cowboy relaxed. "Yes. It goes to Taporipa."

"Is it far?"

"One hour." He fluttered a hand. "More or less."

Murphey swore silently. One hour would be about four miles, probably more. There was no way he could walk another four miles on that sprained ankle in the heat, without water.

"I have much tiredness. Can you let me ride with you to Taporipa?"

"Yes." The youth swung down from the saddle and helped Murphey mount. "I will walk," he said. "I am called Flaco."

"Flaco, eh. Well, you are indeed skinny. I am called Murphey. I have much pleasure in meeting you, Flaco." He reached out and shook hands with the cowboy. He remembered to grip the hand gently. The bone-squeezing handshake used by men north of the border was an insult in Mexico.

"Are you ready, Señor Murphey?"

The boy carried his rifle, an ancient .44-40 octagon barrel Winchester, so Murphey shoved his own .30-30 into the saddle boot. "Let us go."

"About a month ago this Apache began killing lone riders along trails between the mountain villages," the old man said.

An hour later Murphey and the youth walked into a cantina. The narrow room was cool and dark compared to the sun-baked plaza outside. Men sat on homemade chairs or lounged against the walls of white plaster that were streaked red from leaks in the earth-packed roof. At one end of the room a hewed plank balanced horizontally on a pair of wooden boxes. Dark bottles of beer sat like soldiers at attention on the plank. A man with drooping black mustaches stood behind the bar. He was the only man in the room who wasn't wearing a hat.

"I desire a drink of water," Murphey said. "Is there water?"

"Yes."

He was handed a gourd canteen. He drank only a little at first, then lowered the gourd and waited. The men waited with him. His stomach did not signal rejection, so he drank again, longer this time. The water tasted good.

Flaco stood beside the bar watching Murphey, as all the men were. Murphey pulled a three-bladed stockman's knife from his pocket and held it out to the cowboy. "For you," he said.

Flaco shook his head. "No, Señor Murphey, I cannot take that fine knife."

"I owe you my life, cowboy. Take the knife for your children, if not for yourself." The prospector had learned that the poor but proud people of rural Mexico would often refuse a gift themselves for a service, but accept it when offered for their children, even if they had none.

The men laughed. One said, "Tell us about your children, Flaco."

"Yes, Flaco. Tell us."

The boy blushed.

Murphey rubbed his jaw. What was happening here? Was Flaco the target of village pranksters?

An old man spoke: "Take the knife, Flaco. The North American spoke true."

"What's the problem?" Murphey asked.

The old man said, "Flaco believes the magnificent knife is worth much more than a short ride on horseback."

Murphey scratched behind his ear. "Then ask Flaco if he will take me up the mountain to the place where I left my saddle after I buy a new horse from one of you, then accept the knife. Of course, I hope that Apache has not stolen the saddle I left up there."

The men stopped talking to stare at Murphey.

The old man said, "Did you see the Apache today?"

Murphey told about his encounter with the Indian on the trail. Then he asked, "Who is he?"

The old man answered in English. "We call him Apache Gray because he has gray hair. We think he came from the high mountain stronghold where Apaches still live. About a month ago this one began killing lone riders along trails between the mountain villages. But that was three days' ride to the north. We had hoped Apache Gray would not come this far south, nor down from the sierras. The Apaches have always stolen a few horses and cattle. Occasionally a cowboy who is with the cattle is killed. But Apache Gray does not steal—he murders men, and in a strange way."

"How?"

"From footprints near a murdered man's body, the serraños—the people of the sierra—have been able to tell that Apache Gray first shoots a man's horse. He always picks a place where there are many trees or where brush is thick. After the rider is afoot, the Indian creeps from tree to tree until he kills. Some people think he plays games with his victims. Perhaps he takes great pleasure in their fright. Perhaps he is crazy."

"He didn't kill me. Why not?"

"Indeed, that is a mystery. But do not worry, Apache Gray will be killed soon. Ranchers throughout this part of Sonora, and even over in Chihuahua, are offering rewards of cattle and horses for his death. You will want to stay in our village until the trail becomes safe to travel. Flaco is my grandson. I would be pleased if you will be my guest."

"I'd be much obliged."

"My house is a humble home, but clean and comfortable. Flaco and his sister, Little Rosa, live there with me. This time of the year there is plenty of room, as we sleep in the patio where the air is cooler. Would you like to go there now? You look tired."

"I'm plumb tuckered. Let's go."

Murphey waved good-bye to the men in the cantina. He walked with the old man and Flaco along a lane, as Flaco led the horse, with children and dogs joining the procession. Adobe houses formed solid walls on both sides of the dusty lane like square cubes placed side by side. Doors in the walls were of weathered wood long tortured by the desert sun. Windows were barred with slender poles; none had glass. As they moved away from the plaza, door-

A pleasant week passed for Murphey, but his ankle was nearly healed. He was impatient to be on the move.

ways were closer together. Here, walls were not plastered; the exposed adobe bricks had been sculpted by summer rains and weeds grew on the flat roofs.

"I am called Viejo—the old man. And your name?"

"Murphey. You speak English good. Where'd you learn?"

"After my wife died I decided to leave this village. I gave the ranch to my son and went up to California, where I worked as a gardener. My first employer was a college professor. He taught me to speak English."

"He done a good job of learning you."

"Thank you."

"So, Flaco's your grandson?"

"Yes. He and his sister are my only relatives. My son and his wife died several years ago. Malaria."

"I'm sorry."

At the end of the lane they stopped in front of the last house. Flaco led the horse through the front doorway, across a room, then out a doorway that opened onto a patio. Murphey followed the old man into the room, where three handcrafted chairs and a rough table sat on a floor of pounded earth. A framed photograph of a young couple hung on an otherwise bare wall. The man in the picture looked stern. The woman smiled pleasantly.

"My son and his wife," the old man said. "That picture was taken on their wedding day."

Murphey looked out the back door. The flat roof of the house extended eight feet into the patio to form a porch roof. A high wall of bare adobe bricks enclosed the patio, where an orange tree was in blossom. A thatch-roofed cooking ramada stood beside the tree. Behind the patio wall would be a corral for the horse.

"When my son was alive we lived in a big house on the plaza," the old man said, as if apologizing. "We had many head of cattle in those days and a large milpa downriver where we grew much corn and beans. Now we are satisfied with this small house and a small milpa."

"You lost the cattle?"

The old man shrugged. "There was a drought at the time my son died. Flaco was only eight years old—too young to move or sell the cattle. I hurried home, concerned about my son and daughter-in-law. It was too late to save the cattle. We still own the range land, where grass grows tall because only deer graze there. I am fortunate to have a grandson who is able to work a few days each month whenever an extra cowboy is needed by one of the men of the village, and a granddaughter who cooks and keeps the house clean. Ah, here she is."

A child with matchstick arms and legs stepped into the room from the patio. The girl held her stiff arm close to her side.

The old man spoke in Spanish: "Rosita, come meet our guest."

The girl bowed her head in embarrassment. "I have much pleasure in meeting you, sir," she said. The words were Spanish, spoken in a whisper.

"I have much pleasure," Murphey replied, also in Spanish.

Flaco fashioned a cane from a branch of tamarisk for Murphey to use when he hobbled to the cantina each day. The few copper and silver coins in his change purse dwindled while he drank beer and stretched the limits of the Spanish language to jaw with the group of men who gathered in the cantina, mostly to listen. Old Julio Sanchez declared with certainty that only three foreigners—American cattle buyers—had come to the village during his lifetime. That was long ago, and the foreigners had stayed only a day or two. Weeds sprouting in the milpas could be hoed anytime. Who knew when another foreigner would come to the village? "Besides," Old Julio argued, "a man who leaves the safety of the village now might be murdered by Apache Gray."

A pleasant week passed for Murphey, but his ankle was nearly healed and loafing every day had become tiresome. He was impatient to be on the move. There had been no recent reports of Apache Gray in the area, according to a group of four vaqueros who stopped in the village while traveling between Onapa and Santa Rosa. "Perhaps the Indian has gone back to the stronghold," Casimero Sadillo, the hatless owner of the cantina, said that night. Murphey decided he would risk returning to the sierras in a day or two. First, he'd trade his pistol for a riding horse and a pack mule. Murphey figured he could get along without a pistol in the sierras, but he'd feel plumb naked without a rifle.

That evening, Murphey and the old man enjoyed the coolness of the patio as they watched stars appear in the darkening sky. The sweet aroma of orange blossoms mingled with a tinge of wood smoke to scent and soften the air. Out by the orange tree Flaco and

900 MHz breakthrough!

New technology launches wireless speaker revolution...

Recoton develops breakthrough technology which transmits stereo sound through walls, ceilings and floors up to 150 feet.

Breakthrough wireless speaker design blankets your home with music.

By Charles Anton

If you had to name just one new product "the most innovative of the year," what would you choose? Well, at the recent *International Consumer Electronics Show*, critics gave Recoton's new wireless stereo speaker system the *Design and Engineering Award* for being the "most innovative and outstanding new product."

Recoton was able to introduce this whole new generation of powerful wireless speakers due to the advent of 900 MHz technology. This newly approved breakthrough enables Recoton's wireless speakers to rival the sound of expensive wired speakers.

Recently approved technology. In June of 1989, the *Federal Communications Commission* allocated a band of radio frequencies stretching from 902 to 928 MHz for wireless, in-home product applications. Recoton, one of the world's leading wireless speaker manufacturers, took advantage of the FCC ruling by creating and introducing a new speaker system that utilizes the recently approved frequency band to transmit clearer, stronger stereo signals throughout your home.

Crisp sound throughout your home. Just imagine being able to listen to your stereo, TV, VCR or CD player in any room of your home without having to run miles of speaker wire. Plus, you'll never have to worry about range because the new 900 MHz technology allows stereo signals to travel over distances of 150 feet or more through walls, ceilings and floors without losing sound quality.

One transmitter, unlimited receivers. The powerful transmitter plugs into a headphone, audio-out or tape-out jack on your stereo or TV component, transmitting music wirelessly to your speakers or headphones. The speakers plug into an outlet. The one transmitter can broadcast to an unlimited number of stereo speakers and headphones. And since each speaker contains its own built in receiver/amplifier, there are no wires running from the stereo to the speakers.

Full dynamic range. The speaker, mounted in a bookshelf-sized acoustically constructed cabinet, provides a two-way bass reflex design for individual bass boost control. Full dynamic range is achieved by the use of a 2" tweeter and 4" woofer. Plus, automatic digital lock-in tuning guarantees optimum reception and eliminates drift. The new technology provides static-free, interference-free sound in virtually any environment. These speakers are also self-amplified; they can't be blown out no matter what your stereo's wattage.

Stereo or hi-fi, you decide. These speakers have the option of either stereo or hi-fi sound. You can use two speakers, one set on right channel and the other on left, for full stereo separation. Or, if you just want an extra speaker in another room, set it on mono and listen to both channels on one speaker. Mono combines both left and right channels for hi-fi sound. This option lets you put a pair of speakers in the den and get full stereo separation or put one speaker in the kitchen and get complete hi-fi sound.

These wireless stereo headphones have a built-in receiver.

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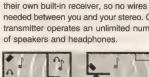
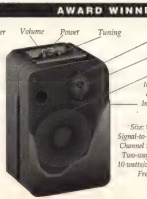
Recoton gives you the freedom to listen to music wherever you want. Your music is no longer limited to the room your stereo is in. With the wireless headphones you can listen to your TV, stereo or CD player while you move freely between rooms, exercise or do other activities. And unlike infrared headphones, you don't have to be in a line-of-sight with the transmitter, giving you a full 150 foot range.

The headphones and speakers have their own built-in receiver, so no wires are needed between you and your stereo. One transmitter operates an unlimited number of speakers and headphones.



Recoton's transmitter sends music through walls to wireless speakers over a 75,000 square foot area.

AWARD WINNING WIRELESS SPEAKER



Built-in receiver and amplifier.

The wireless speaker and headphones both contain a built-in receiver and amplifier. Signals are picked up and transmitted as far as 150 feet away through walls without the use of wires.

Size: 9"H x 6"W x 5.5"L
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Channel Separation: 90 dB
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10 watts/channel RMS amps
Frequency Response: 50 Hz-15 KHz

Don't take our word for it. Try it yourself. We're so sure you'll love the new award-winning Recoton wireless speaker system that we offer you the **Dare to Compare Speaker Challenge.** Compare Recoton's rich sound quality to that of any $200 wired speaker. If you're not completely convinced that these wireless speakers offer the same outstanding sound quality as wired speakers, simply return them within 90 days for a full "No Questions Asked" refund.

Recoton's Design and Engineering Award

"That branch of manzanita is a sign," Viejo said. "That and the one bullet. Apache Gray wants a duel with you. Man to man."

Rosita chatted as they cooked the evening meal on an adobe stove in the ramada. Smoke from the cooking fires filtered up through the palm thatch of the ramada's roof, which was supported at corners by slim poles.

Murphey watched the pair of youngsters. Flaco mixed tortilla dough in a shallow wooden bowl. From the dough he formed a tortilla and placed it on a sheet of tin over one of the two fires that crackled on top of the adobe stove. He waited a moment, then flipped the tortilla over.

Rosita used her one good arm and hand to pour hot water into a coffeepot in which was suspended a cloth funnel that held freshly ground coffee. Murphey inhaled the rich aroma.

Rosita turned from the stove. "Señor Murphey. Grandfather. Do you wish the coffee now, or with the meal?"

"That coffee smells right good to me," Murphey said in English to the old man. "Don't know if I can wait."

"Now, little one," Viejo called. "Thank you."

The girl walked carefully toward Murphey with a clay mug in her hand. Her dark eyes sparkled mischievously. She said, "I know you must have a cup of coffee first thing in the morning, Señor Murphey, even before you say hello. But I never know when you want coffee in the evening." She held out the mug, pulled it back when he reached, laughed, and allowed him to take it. She skipped to the ramada to return with a mug for her grandfather, then turned. "The beans and rice will be ready soon," she called over her shoulder.

"That little gal is a real treasure," Murphey said. He sipped the scalding coffee.

The old man spoke slowly when he answered, the words as soft as a feather: "Indeed, a treasure."

He was silent for long moments, then said, "Murphey, have you ever thought about your old age? Perhaps a time when you'd want to settle down to be more comfortable than you are now, living outdoors."

"No. It don't seem worthwhile to worry about."

"You will forgive me for talking to you this way. But I can talk to you as I cannot talk to the children. Old age is hell, Murphey. In your mind you are a young man, but your body is worn out. You want desperately to ride a spirited horse once again or stride through the village with your head held high. Instead, you hobble with short steps. You yearn to dance with beautiful young women at fiestas, but grating old bones protest. So you sit with other old men and watch. And if you pick up a burden that weighs more than a few pounds, the muscles in your arms and back scold you for days. Nights are long. A young man dreams of riches and pleasure—and he is happy. An old man knows there will be no riches for him on this earth and little pleasure. Only death can release him from his aches and pains. Only death can make him young again when it unites him with those he loved."

Murphey turned to look at the white-haired man. "You make death sound like something good."

"It is, my friend, when you no longer have responsibilities."

"Responsibilities? You mean Flaco and Rosita?"

Viejo paused as if reluctant to answer. "Yes," he said, finally. "I mourn for those young ones."

"Them are two smart younguns. They'll do all right. Flaco's got the makings of a good cowhand. Rosita is just about the brightest and liveliest little gal I ever did know. And cute. She's gonna grow up to be a real beauty. It won't be too many years before every boy in the village will be wanting to marry her."

The old man shook his head. "Rosita will never marry."

Murphey took a deep breath. "You mean because of her arm?" I didn't want to ask about that. What happened to her?"

"A few months ago she fell and broke her elbow. The bones did not heal correctly. As you can see, she cannot bend that arm. She cannot pat tortillas. She cannot lift a baby. No man can afford to have her for his wife. I doubt that Flaco will marry. He is Rosita's right arm. He will stay with her, protect her. They will grow old together, each living half a life. In the meantime, every night I pray that I will wake up the following morning to watch over them until they get older."

"I understand your feelings," Murphey said. "But I wouldn't fret too much. If anything happens to you, the villagers will surely take care of the kids."

"Hardly. Most of the villagers can barely care for their own families."

Few things had ever bothered the prospector. Now he experienced a feeling of concern for the young boy and girl and for the old man who wished for the luxury of death but didn't dare allow himself to die.

The old man's gnarled fingers dug into Murphey's shoulders with surprising strength. "The Apache has taken Rosita!"

"Why don't you take Rosita to a doctor?" he said. "Have that arm fixed right."

"I would sell my soul for that. Unfortunately, my soul is worth nothing to doctors. They want money. We have none."

"I'd sure give you the money if I had it. Trouble is, I ain't got a toot to whistle."

Viejo laughed. He reached out to tap the prospector's knee. "I know you would, Murphey. Forgive me. I didn't mean to burden you with an old man's problems."

Next day Murphey and Flaco picked up their rifles and walked to some nearby flats to hunt rabbits. Murphey figured the flats would be safe from ambush by the Apache. There were no rabbits or signs of rabbits. All game that close to the village had been killed and eaten long ago. But the hunt gave Murphey a chance to stretch his legs.

Early the following morning Flaco shook Murphey's shoulder.

"Señor Murphey, wake up."

The prospector rolled over on the Sonora cot, which was similar to an army cot, but wider and with a frame of husky poles.

"What goes, Flaco?"

"I found this at our front door." He showed Murphey a bundle.

Murphey sat up. "That's my blanket roll. I left it with my saddle up in the sierra. You say it was at the front door?"

"Yes. And this." He held a small but crooked branch. The smooth bark was red and paper thin.

Viejo's cot was at the far end of the porch. He swung his bare feet to the ground. "Let me see that, boy," he said. "It looks like manzanita."

Murphey loosened the ties and unrolled the blanket.

"Ever'thing's here. Soap, razor, box of cartridges. Some rider must have found it."

He picked up the cartridge box. It felt light. He slid it open. Only a single cartridge remained in the box. "That's strange. This box was full—twenty rounds."

Later in the morning the old man called Murphey to come sit with him in the shade of the porch.

"I've been thinking about the branch of manzanita and the one bullet. I think Apache Gray left your blanket roll at our door."

Murphey frowned. "Why do you think that? Some rider could have found it, looked inside, and seen my American razor. Ever'body in the village knows I'm staying with you folks."

"The manzanita. It grows only in the mountains, well beyond the first range—with one exception. There is a patch of manzanita along the river road, north of the village. Nobody knows why that one patch grows here in the desert. That branch is a sign. That and the one bullet. Apache Gray wants a duel with you. Man to man. One bullet in each rifle. Among the trees near the manzanita."

"Oh, come on, Viejo. That's about the wildest story I ever heard tell."

The old man stroked his jaw. "I have been thinking much about the Apache this morning. He only kills men who are armed with rifles. Travelers who are not armed never see him. And he never kills from ambush. First, he shoots the horse, then he stalks the man."

"If that's so, why didn't he kill me? I wasn't on horseback. That Indian could've killed me without no problem there on the trail."

"He saw you were using the rifle for a crutch and realized you were crippled. You said he disappeared after you fell. I think he decided you were not a worthy adversary."

"A worthy adversary? For what?"

"For killing him. I think he wants to die."

"That's crazy talk, Viejo."

The old man smiled. "Apache Gray is an old man. I am an old man. I know how an old man thinks. The Indian has been a warrior. A proud man. Perhaps even a chief. Now he grows feeble, no longer able to ride a horse for three or four days without resting as he could in days past. The time has come for him to go to the Apache heaven. He wishes to die a warrior's death—in battle."

"But why me? Now?"

"You were not frightened of him. You said you attempted to talk to him. And you did not move when he motioned for you to go into the brush. Of course, at that time you did not know he was a killer, but he does not know that."

"How'd he find me here in your house? Tell me that."

"He probably followed you and Flaco in from the desert that first day. Our house is at the edge of the village. A large group of children accompanied us from the cantina to the house. He could have seen."

"I suppose he coulda. Still, I . . ."

Murphey saw Flaco lying in the road beside a downed horse. The old .44-40 lay in the dirt next to the boy.

The old man interrupted. "Do you believe in fate, Murphey?"

"Some. Maybe. I figger a man makes his own fate most of the time."

"I think you are fate, this time."

"What?"

"The day you came to the village we did not know that the Apache had moved this far south. And never before had he come down from the mountains. So Flaco went out hunting deer that day. If you had not come down the trail, the Apache might have killed Flaco, which would have been easy, as the boy has no experience in battle. I believe Apache Gray followed you and Flaco to the village. Again, he could have killed the boy, except that the Indian wanted you to live. You are fate, Murphey. You saved the boy's life."

Murphey bowed his head and shook it. "You're a good man, Viejo. But I think you're tangling up the traces. For one thing, why did the Apache wait until today to leave the blanket roll and the one cartridge?"

Viejo shrugged his shoulders. "You and Flaco went hunting yesterday. The Apache must have seen that you are no longer crippled."

"Well, I ain't about to go traipsing around in the woods with some crazy galoot just so he can get hisself killed."

"You may not have a choice. And, beware, my friend. I believe he will hope that you kill him, but he will try his best to kill you. That is a warrior's way."

Murphey was in the middle of telling a long-winded story when Viejo staggered into the cantina. The prospector had been enjoying a beer with some of the village men. Earlier, the conversation had been about Apache Gray. Angel Alazar had seen fresh hoofprints he did not recognize on the river road when he had started for his milpa in the early morning. He had decided to return to the village and the cantina rather than risk being killed by the savage. Now it was evening and Angel was afraid to go home to his wife.

"Murphey," Viejo gasped. "Come outside."

Murphey stepped out into the plaza. "What's the problem, Viejo?"

The old man's gnarled fingers dug into Murphey's shoulders with surprising strength. "The Apache has taken Rosita!"

The prospector searched the old man's eyes. They showed despair. "When? Tell me quickly!"

"After supper Rosita went to the river for water. She did not return. Flaco went looking for her. He found the olla broken on the riverbank. On top of the olla was a twig of manzanita."

"Damn!"

"It was left as a challenge to you. But Flaco has gone to the manzanita patch. He grabbed his rifle and jumped on his horse. I tried to stop him. He is only a boy, Murphey. The Apache will kill him."

Murphey spun around, grabbed the hitching rope on the closest horse tethered in front of the cantina. He jerked the knot loose. The animal snorted, threw up its head. Murphey swore as he lunged for the saddle horn. He swung into the saddle without bothering to find a stirrup and clapped his heels into the horse's ribs. It grunted and leaped forward.

Above slapping sounds of hooves on sand he heard Angel's voice, "Aiee, Murphey! You got my horse."

He stopped at the house only long enough to strap on his pistol and grab the Winchester. There were six cartridges in the rifle. He leaped into the saddle and whipped the horse along the river road at a run. He didn't know the location of the manzanita patch, but that didn't matter. Flaco's running horse had left gouged hoofprints in the road. But dusk made tracking more difficult with each passing minute.

The road skirted patches of corn and beans where villagers had cleared land for milpas from the strip of heavy brush and tall trees beside the river. The horse's gait became rough as the animal tired. Murphey reached back to swat the animal's rump with the rifle stock. The road curved into a thick growth of brush and trees.

He saw Flaco lying on his face in the road beside a downed horse. The old .44-40 lay in the dirt next to the boy. Murphey hauled back on the reins and leaped to the ground.

Then he saw the Apache.

The Indian stood with his feet apart in the center of the road beyond Flaco's inert form. Murphey swung the butt of the Winchester to his shoulder and started to cock the hammer.

The Apache raised his rifle above his head with both hands.

Murphey paused, surprised. This must be a trick. Why, though? Why hadn't the Indian just bushwhacked him? He increased pressure on his thumb

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The old Indian stopped to pick up a single cartridge. He held it up for Murphey to see, then levered it into the rifle's chamber.

and heard a double click as the gun's hammer reached full cock. He stroked the smooth metal of the trigger under his forefinger.

The Indian shouted some words. He released his hold on the rifle with one hand to point toward a clearing at the side of the road.

Murphey glanced quickly in that direction. Little Rosa was there, tied to a tree. Her face was against the bark with her skinny arms circling the trunk.

The Apache gestured toward Flaco. He motioned for Murphey to come forward, then he stepped backward along the road, still holding both arms and the rifle above his head.

Murphey squinted one eye. Something was fishy here. The Indian was backing away from Flaco. Was the boy dead, or did the Indian want him to see that the boy was alive?

He called, "Rosa! Are you well?"

Her voice, small and trembling, came to him, "Yes. I am well. The Indian did me no harm. But I think he shot someone. I was not able to see."

"Ever'thing is well, Rosita. I will be with you in a moment."

He started cautiously toward the boy, the rifle ready at his shoulder, sights leveled on the Indian, who had stopped walking backwards.

Blood covered the ground around the horse. There was a bloody bandage around Flaco's head. Had the Indian put it there?

Murphey squatted beside the boy. He held the rifle ready in his right hand while he felt for a pulse on Flaco's neck. It was steady and strong. The boy was breathing evenly. Murphey rolled back one edge of the bandage. A small amount of blood seeped from a wound on the boy's forehead. It didn't look like a bullet wound—more like something had hit him. What had Viejo told him? The Indian always shot the horse first. Is that what had happened? Had the Apache shot Flaco's horse? Had the boy hit his head on a rock when the animal had fallen?

The Apache spoke softly.

Murphey looked up into the barrel of the Indian's rifle and hissed through his teeth. That was stupid—he had let the Indian get the drop on him. He thought about making a move to get the Indian, but realized that the Indian would be able to plug him dead center before he could twitch.

The Apache pointed toward Murphey's middle, then slapped his own hip and made a casting away motion.

"You want me to throw away the pistol?" Murphey touched the holster with a finger.

The Indian nodded.

"You're dealing the cards this round, fella." With one hand Murphey unbuckled the gun belt and allowed the gun to fall, then kicked it away with his foot. He still held the Winchester in his right hand.

The Indian smiled. Murphey looked closely at the man's face. He saw no hatred, no anger. The man looked assured, pleased.

The Apache pointed toward Murphey's rifle, then down.

"You want me to lay down the rifle? I'll tell you something, Indian. If Viejo hadn't told me you wanted a fair fight, and if the youngsters wasn't here, I'd try for a shot. Figger I wouldn't have nothing to lose. Okay, I'm putting it down." He dropped the Winchester.

The Apache motioned Murphey back. The prospector backed away from Flaco a dozen paces. The Indian edged up to the guns. His eyes never left Murphey as he stooped to pick up the pistol and fling it off into the brush. He placed his own rifle on the ground, picked up the Winchester, and worked the lever action. Brass .30-30 cartridges cartwheeled out of the rifle to fall beside the Indian's moccasins. His eyes intent on Murphey, the old Indian stooped to pick up a single cartridge. He held it up for Murphey to see, then levered it into the rifle's chamber. With one hand he raised Murphey's Winchester above his head and pumped his arm. Was that a salute? Murphey wondered. The Indian turned and loped out of sight around a bend in the track. Even for an old man his stride flowed like that of a ranging wild animal.

Murphey hurried to grab up the rifle. As he had suspected, it was an old 7-millimeter Mauser. He jacked open the bolt. A single cartridge flipped out onto the ground. The gun's magazine was empty. Murphey picked up the cartridge, slid it into the chamber, and slammed the bolt home.

What now?

He knelt on one knee beside Flaco and scanned the growth in the direction the Indian had taken. A man was out there who would kill him, given the slightest opportunity. Murphey felt his heart pounding in his chest. What had the Apache planned for this duel?

Rosita. Better go cut her loose so she can get outta here.

No. Wait. That Apache's probably got the Winchester aimed at that tree, just waiting for me to go to the girl. Gotta come up with another plan. And soon. I can't go into the brush. I'd make as much noise as a herd of steers plowing through there. That Indian's gotta be an old guerrilla fighter. Wearing them moccasins, he can slip around through this thicket without making a sound. Maybe I can hunker down behind a tree. Just wait for that galoot to move into sight. But which way will he be coming? Maybe from behind. He'd see me first. Pick me off like he was shooting at an old whiskey bottle.

Wish I had me a drink of whiskey right now.

It's getting dark fast. What's gonna happen when it's plumb dark? Think like the Indian, you old fool! Come on, think!

I'll tell you what he's gonna do. He's gonna slip over there by Rosita and cut her with a knife. When she hollers, I come running—he'll gun me down.

What if I don't go when she screams? He'll cut her again. And again. That's what he'll do. There ain't no way of getting around it. I'll charge over there at the first holler.

It's awful quiet out there in the thicket. He's just waiting for me to make a move. Just waiting for me to go over to Rosita. But, if I don't go, he will.

Got me an idea. A crazy idea. Quit being so quiet. Do just the opposite. Make a lot of noise. Make that Apache come to me.

It might work if he's watching Rosita instead of watching the road.

Murphey ran to the horse, expecting at any moment to hear the crack of a rifle. He stepped into the saddle. The horse started toward the village. Murphey reined him around. He whomped the horse in the ribs with both heels. The startled animal jumped into a run.

Murphey cut loose with a high-pitched cowboy yell.

The horse shied sideways when it came to Flaco and the dead animal in the road. Murphey grasped for the saddle horn with his hand that held the reins. The prospector gained his balance. He kicked the horse to urge it onward.

He threw back his head and yelled again as he raced through the thicket and out onto open desert.

He felt a thrill tingle from head to toe. If it's time to cash in your chips, you old desert rat, this is the way to go. I know how you feel, Indian. Come on out. Let's get on with the show!

Murphey jerked the horse to a stop a hundred yards out from the thicket and swung around.

The horse sensed his excitement. It pawed at the ground, snorted, tossed its head. Murphey held a tight rein in his left hand, the Mauser in his right hand.

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There was yet enough light to make him an easy target for a rifleman on foot. Would the Apache accept the challenge, or simply shoot him from ambush? It all depended on how the Indian was thinking.

Minutes ticked past with silence from the thicket. Murphey frowned. Was his crazy idea a mistake? Was the Apache quietly cutting Rosita's throat? Stabbing Flaco? Was he disappearing into the desert? Soon it would be too dark to see a target.

He heard the hoofbeats of a galloping horse. A rider and horse emerged from the thicket, then halted.

The Apache shouted a long phrase that sounded like the chatter of a machine gun—"Cat-ra-ra ata un"—and started his horse toward Murphey at a run.

Murphey leaned forward in the saddle and dug in his heels.

Murphey and the old man lounged on the patio while they watched stars appear in the sky. Murphey inhaled deeply. The scent of orange blossoms seemed sweeter than he had remembered.

The old man said, "More horses and cattle are coming in every day from ranchers in the sierra as reward for killing the Apache. Flaco tells me that already there are twenty horses and nearly a hundred head of cattle on our range land. Nearly half are cows."

"That's good. Now you can take Rosita to a doctor to get that arm fixed proper."

"Yes. Rosita will grow up to be a beautiful and rich woman. And Flaco is a hero throughout the sierras. Already men call him by his true name—Heberto."

Murphey watched a falling star streak across the night sky.

"I have been thinking about something," Viejo said.

Murphey laughed. "Seems to me you're often thinking about something, Viejo."

"That is true. What else can an old man do? I have been thinking about the Apache. You said Flaco shot him while you and the Apache stalked each other in the darkness."

"Yep. The boy came to his senses, grabbed his rifle, and met the Apache face-to-face while I was circling around. That's the way it happened."

"When you first returned, Flaco said he didn't remember shooting the Apache. It was only after you insisted several times that the boy began to think that he shot Apache Gray."

Murphey pulled a bandana from his hip pocket and honked his big nose. "You know how it is when you get conked on the noggin. Ever'thing's a little confused for a while."

The old man waited.

Murphey said nothing more.

Finally, the old man said, "I saw the Apache's body after the men brought it to the village. He was shot in the forehead."

"Yep."

"It was a small hole. Too small for a bullet from Flaco's .44 caliber rifle."

"Maybe the flesh squeezed in around the hole so it looked small."

"On the forehead?"

Murphey said, "It sure is a pretty evening. Look at them stars."

"I talked with Flaco and Rosa. Half of everything we own belongs to you."

"Sure. Thanks, Viejo."

"I do not mean *mi casa es su casa*. I have drawn papers that give you half ownership to the range land, livestock, milpa, and house."

Murphey sat up in the chair. "You can't do that." His voice was sharp. "I don't want to be tied down to a chunk of land and a bunch of stupid critters. I want to see what's on the other side of them mountains. No, sir. I won't take it."

The old man touched Murphey's arm gently. "I know you perhaps better than you know yourself. You are free to go—like an eagle, soaring. And, of course, you have the pick of the horses. But one day you will wake up with your bones aching from sleeping on the hard ground and you will yearn for the sound of another's voice. That day you will know that you have turned a corner in your life. You will need a family around you, and a home. When that day arrives, your family and home are here in Taporipa." ■

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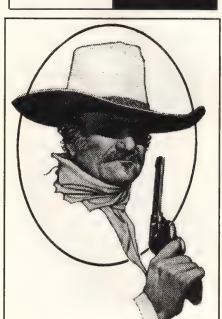

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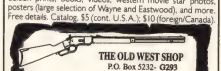

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BY
Bill Gulick

Thief in Camp

The morning after the wagon train went into camp on the plain near Fort Laramie, Jimmy Coleman saddled his pony, Cherokee, and was fixing to go for a ride when that nuisance of a Ben Frankfort showed up. Being two years older than Jimmy, Ben Frankfort had been making life miserable for him ever since the wagon train left Independence. What started it was that Jimmy's mother had bought him a fine pony to ride to Oregon, while Ben's pa had said riding in the wagon was good enough for any youngster, which had made Ben so jealous he spit green.

"Where do you think you're going?" Ben said.

"Guess that's my business, not yours."

"You know what Pa said. Kids aren't supposed to go out of sight of camp without there's a man along."

"Aw, your pa can't boss me."

"Pa's wagon captain."

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"What of it?"

"And you don't even have a pa."

"Well, you don't have a ma, so that makes us even."

Ben took hold of the pony's reins. "Let me ride Cherokee twice around the camp and I won't tell, no matter what you do."

"No."

"I whipped you once. I could do it again."

"Not today, you couldn't."

Ben shot a look down the slope toward camp. Nobody was watching, but still he hesitated. "Heck, if I did whip you, you'd tattle."

"Only girls tattle. Now get out of my way."

Jimmy gave Ben a shove. Ben shoved back. Tripping, Jimmy fell down, bounced to his feet, and charged at Ben. He managed to catch Ben a good one on the temple, but the older boy's weight and reach soon proved too much for him. Next thing he knew, he was lying flat on his back and Ben was swinging aboard Cherokee.

"Yipee!" Ben yelled. "Let's go!"

Cherokee went. His head went down, his back went up, and Ben went sailing through the air, hitting with a thump that knocked all the wind out of him. Jimmy grabbed a stick and made for him. A couple of wild whacks were all he got time for; then Ben got his feet under him and made fast and frequent tracks for camp.

Sobbing with frustrated anger, Jimmy dropped the stick and leaned against the pony's neck. "Big old bully! Someday I'll peel him good! Someday—"

Before he could name half the unpleasant things he was going to do to Ben Frankfort, a quiet voice said, "Howdy, youngster. Kind of a rough game you two was playin', wa'n't it?"

Jimmy turned and stared up at the man, who was tall, gray-eyed, dressed in buckskin, and riding a good-looking sorrel horse.

Jimmy brushed hastily at his eyes. "We weren't playing. We were fighting."

"Kind of outmatched yourself, didn't you?"

"I'd fight anybody tried to ride Cherokee without my say-so."

The gray eyes were sympathetic. "Can't say I blame you a mite fer that. Tell me, son, you know whar I kin find a gent name of Theodore Frankfort?"

"Sure, I can take you right to him."

News that a guide was being hired had spread through the camp, and everybody had come over for a look.

"I'd be obliged, boy; I truly would."

Riding down to camp, Jimmy covertly eyed the man, who had a long-barreled rifle slung across his back, a pistol and a knife in his belt, and a powder horn and bullet pouch hung from one shoulder. He was clean-shaved, handsome in a rugged sort of way, and appeared to be the same age as Mr. Frankfort, which would be in the middle thirties.

When they rode into the enclosure, Jimmy said, "That's Mr. Frankfort. The big man with the black hat."

The man rode up to where Mr. Frankfort was bossing a crew removing a wagon wheel. "Mr. Frankfort?"

"Yes?"

"Heerd tell you're lookin' fer a guide," he said.

"We are."

The man swung off his horse. "Name's Buff Shelley. Rate's five dollars a day."

Mr. Frankfort gave him an appraising look. "Are you acquainted with the trail?"

"Been over it a few times, yeah."

The men crowded in, asking numerous questions, which Buff Shelley answered with calm brevity.

Mr. Frankfort nodded. "I guess you'll do. But we'd better have an understanding. I'm wagon captain. You'll take orders only from me. Agreed?"

By now, news that a guide was being hired had spread through the camp, and everybody had come over for a look. Feeling a hand on his shoulder, Jimmy looked up to see his mother standing behind him. She was slim and still pretty enough to turn the head of any man. Jimmy saw Buff Shelley's eyes pause for a moment on his mother's face, saw Mr. Frankfort's sudden frown, then Buff was looking at Mr. Frankfort and nodding.

"That's fine with me. You boss the wagons, I'll guide 'em."

As they all went back to their interrupted chores, Jimmy started to ride off on Cherokee, but his mother suddenly noticed the way his clothes and face were dirtied.

"Jimmy!" she scolded. "What have you been doing?"

"I sort of fell down."

"After I just put clean clothes on you!"

"It was an accident. I didn't go to do it."

She dusted him off, her tongue clucking chidingly. "You're getting to be a regular little savage, do you know that?"

"You want me to be a sissy?"

"Not at all. But your father was a gentleman. I want you to grow up to be a gentleman, too."

"Dad got dirty sometimes. When we went camping—"

"I'm not asking you to stay clean all the time, Jimmy. But surely you can make some effort to keep your clothes nice. Other boys do. Look at Ben Frankfort."

"You looked at him lately?"

"No; why?"

Jimmy started to say that Ben had fallen a sight farther and harder than he had, but he knew if he told his mother that, he'd have to tell her why Ben had fallen. So he let it go.

The wagon train lined out for Oregon next morning, and for the next week or so Jimmy spent most of his waking hours with Buff Shelley. He learned a pile of things, too. Like how you trapped beaver, how you lifted a scalp, how you hunted antelope and such. Unconsciously, he began to imitate the guide's manner of riding, walking, and speaking. Buff seemed to enjoy his company and they talked about every subject under the sun.

One day Buff said, "Your ma's a widow, I take it?"

"Yes, sir. Dad died a year ago."

"Whar you from?"

"Virginia. We're going out to Oregon to live with my uncle—till Mom gets married again, anyhow."

"Oh, yore ma's gettin' married agin?"

"Well, people back home say she's bound to."

"Got a man picked out, has she?"

"Nobody particular. But I guess she's looking around."

Buff's gray eyes twinkled.

"We're getting into dangerous Indian country," Mr. Frankfort said. "You'd better keep Jimmy close to the wagon."

"What kind of man is she lookin' around fer?"

"A gentleman, I guess. At least she's always talking about how Dad was a gentleman and how I got to grow up to be a gentleman, so I guess that's what she's after."

Buff looked thoughtful. "Would a well-fixed widower like Mr. Frankfort fit the bill?"

"I suppose so," Jimmy mumbled without enthusiasm.

"You don't take to Mr. Frankfort, do you?"

Jimmy scratched Cherokee's neck disconsolately. "He's kind of bossy. But I guess he's all right."

"How'll it suit you to have Ben for a stepbrother?"

"Aw, I ain't afraid of Ben. He's bossy, too, but only because he's bigger'n me."

"Kind of a bully, is he?"

"Tries to be. But I'll show him who lays the chunk."

Buff laughed heartily. "That's the spirit, boy. Size ain't everything. Why, I recollect a leetle fella I used to know, name of Kit Carson. Regular runt of a fella, he was, but one time when a great big hunk of Injun jumped him—"

Buff was just full of stories about Kit, and that evening Jimmy repeated them to his mother, while she sat listening with a growing look of concern on her face.

"—an' then this jigger of an Indian comes b'ilin' at Kit, fixin' to cut out his gizzard. But you know what ol' Kit done? He jest tripped the fella, jumped astraddle of his back, sunk his knife in clean up to Green River, then, whack, he's lifted hisself a piece of hair! An' another—"

"Jimmy!"

"Huh?"

"Where on earth did you hear such horrible stories? And where did you pick up such abominable English?"

"Why, me and Buff was jest talkin', and Buff—"

"Mr. Shelley, you mean? Buff Shelley, the guide?"

"Yes'm."

His mother's lips tightened. "Is that all he has to do, fill young minds with fantastic, terrible stories?"

"But they're all true! Buff swears they're true! He's been all over the West and seen all kinds of things!"

"Indeed!"

"Sure! Buff knows more than anybody."

"About what?"

"Why, Injuns and trapping and trails and hunting—there's nothin' he don't know."

His mother frowned. "Jimmy, I'm afraid there are a lot of very important things Buff Shelley doesn't know. Things such as proper grammar, good manners, and—"

Mr. Frankfort strode into the circle of light shed by their fire before Jimmy could tell her all the details of what trappers did, and Jimmy's mother looked relieved. Removing his hat, Mr. Frankfort smiled graciously at her.

"I don't want to alarm you, Mrs. Coleman, but I feel I should warn you. We're getting into dangerous Indian country. You'd better keep Jimmy close to the wagon."

"Thank you, Mr. Frankfort," his mother said. "I appreciate your thoughtfulness." She looked at Jimmy. "Tomorrow you must ride in the wagon, dear."

"But Mom—"

"You heard what Mr. Frankfort said. There are dangerous Indians about."

"Shucks, they're just Crows. Buff says they're harmless as flies, if you handle them right."

when the trail halted for its noonings, Buff had promised to take him on an antelope hunt. So he swallowed hard and said, "All day?"

"Well—"

Well, next day was as peaceful as could be, with not an Indian in sight, so when the wagons stopped at noon, Jimmy's mother said she guessed it would be all right if he exercised Cherokee a little bit. So he hurriedly lugged his saddle out to the horse herd and saddled up, fearful that Buff would ride off without him. How Ben Frankfort happened to get wind of their expedition he never knew, but he'd no more than got the saddle

Ben looked around to make sure nobody could overhear, then he muttered, "How'd you like to go hunting with me tomorrow?"

Mr. Frankfort bowed. "I felt I should warn you, Mrs. Coleman. Good night."

When Mr. Frankfort had gone, Jimmy's mother gazed at him reproachfully. "Jimmy, that was very impolite."

"What'd I do?"

"You know very well what you did. You flatly contradicted Mr. Frankfort. You should be ashamed of yourself. After all, he has been very kind to us and is only doing his duty."

"But Buff says—"

"You've been seeing a great deal too much of Buff Shelley," his mother cut in sharply. "Now remember, tomorrow you ride in the wagon."

The thing Jimmy suddenly remembered was that tomorrow, cinched up than there was Ben at his elbow.

"Where you riding off to?" Ben asked suspiciously.

"Nowhere."

"Bet I know. Bet you're going hunting with Buff."

"Well, what if I am?"

"Your ma will tan you, she finds out."

"How's she going to find out?"

"Pa will tell her."

"How's he going to find out?"

"I'll tell him."

Heated remarks were exchanged, but before they could tangle, Buff rode up. "C'mon boy, time's a-wastin'."

They rode off, got their antelope, and were back with the wagon train in practically no time at all. But Mr. Frankfort was fit to be tied. Jimmy's mother had been worried sick, he claimed, and who did Buff think he was, anyway, taking a child out into dangerous country without the wagon captain's say-so?

Buff listened indifferently until Mr. Frankfort had run out of breath, then he said, "C'mon, Jimmy, we'll go make peace with yore ma."

Jimmy's mother stared accusingly at him as they rode up. "Jimmy, I thought I told you—"

"Ma'am," Buff cut in, touching the rim of his slouch hat carelessly, "don't jaw at the boy. I took him huntin' with me 'cause I figered he was due fer some fun. You want to lay on blame, lay it on me."

It wasn't often Jimmy's mother looked taken aback. But she sure looked that way now. "I'm quite capable of raising my son without any advice from you, Mr. Shelley. Furthermore—"

" 'Tain't advice I'm givin' you, ma'am. I'm jest a-tellin' you some facts of nature as I've observed 'em. This is a prime colt you got here. But you can't picket a yearlin' on a short rope an' expect him to build up his legs an' wind."

And with that Buff wheeled his horse around and rode off.

While his mother stood in stunned silence, Jimmy tied Cherokee to the tailgate of the wagon and then went to her, ready to take his tongue-lashing. But she was still staring after Buff Shelley. "What a rude man!"

"I don't think so," Jimmy said humbly. "I think he's the nicest man I know."

"You call him nice after hearing how he spoke to me?"

Jimmy scuffed the dirt with a toe. "Well, he takes me hunting and he talks to me and answers questions, just like Dad used to do. And when he saw you were mad at me, he tried to get you mad at him instead—just like Dad always did."

The funniest look came over his mother's face. All of a sudden she put an arm around him and pulled him close. "Oh, Jimmy, I'm sorry! You do need a father so!" She gazed into his eyes. "Would it hurt you terribly, dear, if I were to marry again?"

"Guess that's according to who you picked."

"I'd make sure you approved, of course," she said, trying to make a joke of it. "So if you have anyone you'd like to recommend—"

He stared off in the direction Buff had just ridden. "Well, since you asked me—"

On Sunday afternoon they camped in a fine valley where there was plenty of grass, wood, and a clear-water stream. It was decided that they would lie over here for the Sabbath. Buff brought in enough fresh meat for a real feast that evening, and as soon as supper was over out came the fiddles, and couples began dancing around a big bonfire.

Jimmy was standing watching the fun when he heard Ben Frankfort whisper at his elbow, "Psst, c'mere a minute."

Jimmy followed him off into the shadows. Ben looked around to make sure nobody could overhear, then he muttered, "How'd you like to go hunting with me tomorrow?"

"Just you and me, you mean?"

"And Cherokee."

"What would we do for a gun?"

Ben led him to his father's wagon, rummaged in it, and brought out a brand-new Henry rifle. "Guess we can kill any old antelope in the world with this, can't we?"

"Did your pa say you could use it?"

"He'll be too busy bossing things to notice it's gone."

It was a sneaky thing to do, but the way Jimmy reasoned, it was Ben who was being sneaky, not he. And it was a compliment, in a way, Ben's asking him to go along, though the main reason he'd done it, Jimmy guessed, was that he didn't know the first thing about hunting antelope, so just naturally he had to come to somebody who could show him how it was done.

"Well?" Ben demanded. "You wanta go?"

"Sure," Jimmy said. "Why not?"

It being Sunday and a day of rest, everybody slept later than usual the next morning, and the sun was an hour high before the breakfast fires began to crackle. Jimmy had done battle in dreams with his conscience all night long, his conscience losing every round, and it was still getting the whey beat out of it now as he sat waiting for the breakfast call. Suddenly there came a clatter of hoofs, and Mr. Tracy, who had been riding herd outside the enclosure, galloped up, shouting excitedly, "Indians! Indians!"

The camp panicked. Women were screaming at children, men were running every which way, but Mr. Frankfort knew exactly what to do.

Standing in the center of the camp, he roared, "Women and children inside the wagons! . . . Lige, Sam, Ned, take your men and guard the sides you've been assigned to! Step lively, men! It's our lives we're fighting for!"

There was a frenzied scramble for positions. Suddenly Jimmy heard Buff's sharp voice ring out, "Hold it, men! They's no call to spook!"

The Indians were in sight now, some fifty of them, streaming down a grassy slope to the northwest.

Mr. Frankfort seized Buff's arm. "Are you crazy? Can't you see they're attacking us?"

"I kin see real good," Buff said imperturbably. "They're Crows, an' friendly. Ain't a bit of harm in 'em."

"How do you know?"

"See that Injun leadin' the pack? He's an old sidekick of mine. Slept in his lodge many's the time."

As the Indians came galloping down the slope, their leader was reining his horse this way and that, twisting his body about and waving his arms around in an odd fashion. Buff was doing queer things with his hands and arms, too, Jimmy noticed, and he suddenly remembered what Buff had told him about the way the Indians had of making sign talk with one another as far off as they could see or be seen. Buff grinned at Mr. Frankfort.

While Mr. Frankfort and the other men watched suspiciously, Buff walked out and greeted the Indians calmly.

"Jest tell your boys to hold their fire. I'll go out an' palaver with the jiggers."

While Mr. Frankfort and the other men watched suspiciously, Buff walked out and greeted the Indians as calmly as you please, paying no mind to the way they came charging at him. Seeing he wouldn't scare, they pulled up and

milled their horses around him, while he and their head man shook hands. Presently the Indian slid off his horse and Buff led him into the enclosure, where Mr. Frankfort was waiting.

"This here is Wolf Runner," Buff said. "Seen our dust yesterday, he says, and decided to ride down fer a look."

"He's a Crow, you say? I've heard the Crows are born thieves and murderers."

"Man's apt to hear most anything, he listens to the wrong people."

"Well, if his intentions are friendly, he's welcome. But tell him I won't have his people in camp. Tell him to make them keep their distance or I'll be obliged to—"

Right about then, Mr. Frankfort looked around. The Crows had got off their horses and were swarming into the enclosure from every direction. They were friendly, all right, grinning at everybody, lifting up wagon covers to peer inside, stooping to see what was in pots and pans simmering over the fires, fingering knives and axes and anything lying around loose with monkeylike curiosity. Mr. Frankfort frantically tried to put a stop to it.

"Don't do that!" he exclaimed, rushing over to a grinning buck who had lifted a steaming coffee-pot off a fire. "Put that back!" he cried, wresting an ax out of the hand of another brave who was testing its edge. "Leave that rifle alone!" he shouted, snatching his new Henry away from still a third Indian who was hefting it admiringly. Tossing the gun back into the wagon, he turned to Buff. "Clear them out of here before they steal us blind!"

Buff made sign talk with Wolf Runner, who issued a guttural order. Spoons, knives, and a miscellaneous collection of small items magically reappeared from their hiding places upon the persons of the Indians and were returned to their owners.

"They don't mean no harm," Buff said. "Give 'em some breakfast an' they'll be on their way."

"You mean we've got to feed this whole mob?"

"A hungry Indian's apt to turn mean. Feed him an' he'll ride away happy. It's a cheap way to buy friendship."

The Indians were fed, and when breakfast was over, the band of Crows rode on its merry way, except for Wolf Runner, whom Buff had persuaded to travel with the wagon train for a few days.

"He's a top dog in the Crow tribe," Buff explained to Mr. Frankfort. "Long as he's with us the Crows won't give us no trouble."

"They had better not," Mr. Frankfort said, tight-lipped.

Now that the excitement had simmered down, the men went to work at their repairing chores and the women settled down to baking and washing. Ben swiped the rifle and a handful of cartridges out of his pa's wagon, Jimmy saddled Cherokee, and the two boys made for the river. The willows growing along the south shore soon hid them from camp. What they would do, Ben said, was go a mile or so downstream, cross the river, then make their hunt in the hilly country on the far side.

Ben was afoot, carrying the rifle, while Jimmy rode Cherokee. Finding a place where it looked as if the river could be forded without too much trouble, they paused. Ben didn't like the thought of getting his feet wet.

"Cherokee will carry double, won't he?"

"Don't know," Jimmy said dubiously. "But we can try him."

"You hold the rifle. Now gimme a stirrup."

Taking the rifle, Jimmy lifted his left foot out of the stirrup and talked soothingly to Cherokee while Ben climbed aboard. "I'll take the rifle now," Ben said. "Make him go easy."

Jimmy passed the rifle back and urged Cherokee into the water. The current was stronger than it looked. Not liking the feel of the slick rocks underfoot, Cherokee stopped in midstream.

"Make him go!" Ben commanded.

"Keep your shirt on. He'll go when he's ready to."

"Well, if you won't make him go, I will!" Ben said, and booted Cherokee good with both heels.

Next thing Jimmy knew, Cherokee was pitching, then falling. Ice-cold water closed over Jimmy. He came up spluttering, caught Ben—who was wrong side up—by the collar and made for the bank. Mighty disgusted with it all, Cherokee plunged up out of the river. Dumping Ben to the ground, Jimmy went over and

> **"If your pa will skin you for falling into the river, what'll he do to you for losing his new rifle?" Jimmy asked.**

calmed the pony down. Ben spit out a mouthful of water and glared at Cherokee.

"Fool horse! Why didn't you tell me he wouldn't carry double?"

"He was doing all right till you kicked him."

"Lucky he didn't drown us both!" Ben complained. Suddenly he remembered something. "Where's the rifle?"

"I dunno. I gave it back to you."

"That's right, you did. Guess it's—" He stared down at the ground. "It's gone!"

Well, they looked for it. First they looked along the bank, and then they took off their clothes and waded out into the river and felt around among the rocks with their bare feet. Just a few yards downstream from where they had tried to cross was a deep hole that the current had washed out as it swirled against a steep gravel bluff. The water was way over their heads and the current was so swift that, though they dived time after time, it was impossible to examine the bottom with any thoroughness.

They kept trying till they were both near drowned. Finally they sat down on the bank, spent and gasping.

Jimmy shot Ben a look. "Must be in that hole. Isn't that what you figure?"

"Yeah. But we'll never find it. It's gone for good."

"What'll you tell your pa?"

Ben looked scared. "I dunno. But I'll think of something." He started pulling on his wet clothes. "First thing I got to do is slip back to the wagon and get into some dry clothes. Pa finds out I fell in the river, he'll skin the hide off me."

"If he'll skin you for falling into the river, what'll he do to you for losing his new rifle?"

Ben's lower lip quivered. "He didn't see me take it, did he?"

"Well, you got to tell him, don't you? 'Cause he's bound to find out it's gone."

Ben looked mighty sick. "You won't tell him, will you, Jimmy?"

"Me tell him? Why should I?"

"Cross your heart and hope to die?"

Jimmy made the sign and said the words.

When they got back to the wagon train, Jimmy unsaddled Cherokee and changed into dry clothes. Then he wandered around the camp, keeping as far as possible from the Frankfort wagon, where he figured the explosion was due most any time now. Inevitably he ended up squatting beside Buff, who was sitting in the shade of a wagon exchanging grunts and hand talk with Wolf Runner. Buff grinned at him.

"Wolf Runner here had himself a nap a few minutes ago an' dreamed a queer dream. Said he dreamed he seen a couple of white young'uns playin' in the river like they was beaver. Only they was so anxious to git at their game they plumb forgot to take off their clothes, so they—"

"Aw, he didn't really dream that. You saw Ben and me come back to camp with our clothes all wet."

"So I did. What happened?"

Jimmy had promised Ben he wouldn't tell Mr. Frankfort, but he hadn't said a word about not telling Buff. So he told Buff, though first he made Buff promise he wouldn't tell Mr. Frankfort. Buff scowled and shook his head.

Jimmy knew that all he would have to do would be to point a finger and say one word and Ben would blubber out the whole story.

"That's a bad thing, boy, stealin' a gun an' goin' huntin' on yore lonesome. You an' Ben shouldn't of done it."

"I know that now," Jimmy said contritely. "But what's Mr. Frankfort going to do to Ben when he finds out the rifle's gone?"

"The world'll bring you trouble enough, without you go borrowin' somebody else's. Ben made his bed, now he kin lie in it. Jest you let this be a lesson to you."

Right then, Jimmy saw Mr. Frankfort climb out of his wagon, call sharply to Ben, and talk to him for a spell. There wasn't much doubt what they were talking about, because Mr. Frankfort kept gesturing at the wagon and Ben kept shaking his head violently. Jimmy saw Mr. Frankfort stride to the front of the wagon and pick up the bullwhip lying on the seat. He felt kind of sick.

But instead of walking back to the rear of the wagon and going to work on Ben, Mr. Frankfort called out something to a man working nearby, turned and walked across camp toward the spot where Jimmy, Buff, and Wolf Runner were sitting. Buff grunted something to Wolf Runner and they both got to their feet.

"I'll mince no words, Shelley!" Mr. Frankfort snapped. "A brand-new Henry rifle belonging to me has been stolen! Tell your thieving Crow friend I want it back —and quick!"

All work in camp ceased. As the crowd gathered around Mr.

Frankfort, all eyes were on the tall, silent Crow and the stony-faced white man who stood beside him.

Jimmy shot a look at Ben, who had followed his father and was now standing staring glassy-eyed at Wolf Runner. *It's him or me,* Ben must be thinking, *and he's nothing but an Indian.*

Buff said quietly, "You're barkin' up the wrong tree, Frankfort. Wolf Runner didn't steal yore rifle."

"Then some of his people did."

"You're wrong there, too."

"I'm not asking your opinion. I'm telling you. You vouched for him. But the rifle is gone. Now I want you to tell him that I'm going to have him tied up and guarded until the gun is returned to me. He knows where his people have gone and who stole it. He can tell you, and you can ride after them." Mr. Frankfort paused, letting the coils of the whip drop free of his hand until the popper trailed in the dust. "Give him my message."

"No."

Mr. Frankfort beckoned to the men standing behind him. "Joe, Frank, Lige, Ned, seize this Indian and tie him up. Maybe a touch of the whip will make him admit the truth—even to his soft-hearted friend."

The four men moved forward uneasily, then stopped as Buff said, "You lay your hands on Wolf Runner, you'll buy yourself a bigger hunk of trouble than you kin eat. He didn't steal yore blame rifle, Frankfort, an' neither did his bucks. Put that whip away 'fore you make a fool of yourself."

"Shelley, you're fired!"

"All right. But when I ride out of this camp, Wolf Runner is ridin' with me. Any man tries to lay a hand on him is goin' to have big trouble with me."

Jimmy's mother had joined the crowd and was standing with an arm around him, looking on with a puzzled light in her eyes. He felt weak clean down to his toes. He knew that all he would have to do would be point a finger and say one word and Ben would blubber out the whole story. Or, Buff could do it. But they had both promised.

"Men," Mr. Frankfort said, "I gave you an order. Carry it out."

Shaking his head, one of the men muttered, "It's your gun and your quarrel, Frankfort. Reckon we'll let you kill your own snakes."

Mr. Frankfort went livid. "That's just what I will do!" he exclaimed, and raised the whip.

Jimmy heard his mother gasp. He saw Buff grab the upraised arm and twist the whip out of Mr. Frankfort's hand. Stumbling backward, Mr. Frankfort fell to the ground. For a moment he lay there; then, cursing with words Jimmy had never known existed, he leaped to his feet and charged Buff.

There came a sharp, pistol-like crack as Buff's right fist landed; then Mr. Frankfort sagged to the ground. Rubbing his knuckles and looking sorrowful, Buff turned to Jimmy's mother and said apologetically, "Shore hated to do that, ma'am, but it didn't seem fitten language fer a lady er young boys to listen to."

Then he went over to Ben Frankfort, put an arm around his shoulders, and said kindly, "No need to blubber, son. C'mon, we'll go down to the river an' you kin show me whar you lost it. Wolf Runner here is one half beaver an' t'other half fish. He'll find the fool thing for you."

While they were gone, Jimmy went back to the wagon with his mother and told her the whole story. He expected to get a good scolding but, when he was done, she didn't have a word to say. She just stood gazing off into the distance with a funny kind of look in her eyes, and when Ben, Wolf Runner, and Buff came back to camp a while later with the rifle, she still had that look. Buff walked over, took off his hat, and stood sheepish before her.

"Mrs. Coleman," he said finally, "s'pose Jimmy's already told you, but—"

"Yes, he's told me."

"Wal, I know it must seem queer to you, him not sayin' anything when he knowed the truth, an' me not sayin' anything, but they way of it was—"

"We'd promised," Jimmy blurted out.

Buff nodded solemnly. "That's right, ma'am. We'd promised. Kind of gave our word of honor as gentlemen, so to speak. Now I ain't meanin' to give you no advice on how to raise a young 'un, 'cause it's plain to see he's gettin' fine raisin' jest the way things stand. But I—wal, I wanted you to know how things are with us men. An' if there's any blame to be laid—"

Jimmy's mother shook her head. There was a glow in her eyes, a gentle kind of glow that Jimmy couldn't remember having seen there since his father had died.

"You men!" she scolded, as if she didn't mean to scold at all. "You foolish men!"

Something told Jimmy that when they got to Oregon they wouldn't be living with his uncle very long. Which was fine with him.

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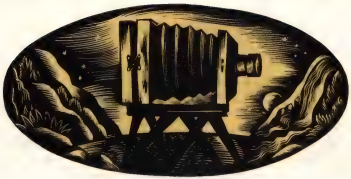
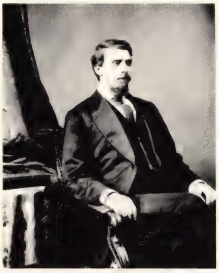


THE LEGACY OF JUDGE ISAAC C. PARKER

PERHAPS THE MOST CHILLING monument of the struggle to bring justice to the wild and often bloody West is the grim and utilitarian six-at-a-time gallows at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Tucked behind a high wooden fence in the southwest corner of Fort Smith National Historic Site, the gallows—a painstakingly constructed replica of the 1886 instrument that sent dozens of lawbreakers to their final reward—has come to represent the tenure of the nation's original "hanging judge"—Isaac C. Parker.



The sensational atmosphere surrounding the Fort Smith court spawned a host of myths about Parker. One of the most pernicious is that Parker was a self-appointed judge who set up shop in Fort Smith because of the great potential to hang people there.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Parker was described by those who knew him as a gentle and compassionate family man who was given the burden of bringing justice to a region known as a haven for murderers and rapists.

"I do not desire to hang you men," he

BY RHEUBEN BUCKNER

once told those he condemned. "It is the law."

Parker was thirty-six years old when he came to Fort Smith to assume the federal bench for the Western District of Arkansas in 1875, and the seventy-thousand-square-mile jurisdiction included Indian Territory, now the state of Oklahoma. The Territory lay just across the Arkansas River from Fort Smith, and because of laws which forbade Indians from arresting non-Indians—no matter how heinous the crime—it became a refuge for criminals of the worst sort.

To Parker's court fell the responsibility of administering justice where white criminals were involved, and in resolving disputes between Indians and whites. Federal law compelled Parker to sentence those found guilty of murder and rape to death and, during the first fourteen years of his administration, his power was unequaled in the history of American justice—there existed no possibility of appeal. The Supreme Court did not begin reviewing cases involving capital punishment until 1889, and before that time the only intervention possible was a commutation or pardon from the president of the United States.

Parker, a Republican and former prosecuting attorney and congressman, was appointed to the federal bench by Ulysses S. Grant as a political concession after losing a Missouri senatorial race when the state went Democratic in 1874. Grant had at first appointed Parker as chief justice of the Territory of Utah, but Parker asked for the Fort Smith post because it was closer to his home of St. Joseph, Missouri. The Arkansas bench had recently been vacated by Judge William Story, amid a congressional investigation into graft and corruption.

Before 1875, the court was a model of inefficiency. Although relatively few cases were tried, court costs for just one fourteen-month period topped $400,000. Congress came close to abolishing the court, but was stayed by the resignations—under threats of impeachment—of Story and District Attorney Newton J. Temple. Grant instructed Parker to clean house and to restore the respect of the court.

THE ORIGINAL GALLOWS WAS DESIGNED TO HANG UP TO A DOZEN MEN AT ONCE, ALTHOUGH SIX PROVED TO BE THE OFFICIAL RECORD.

Parker was reported to have been a broad-shouldered man who was given to pudginess, standing more than six feet tall and weighing in excess of two hundred pounds. He had piercing blue eyes and a goatee, and his friends knew him as "Ike." He held court on the first floor of the barracks building of the old fort overlooking the Arkansas River, a site the army abandoned in 1871.

The primitive territorial jail, located in the basement of the old barracks building, is best described by the name that those imprisoned there gave it: Hell on the Border. More than two hundred inmates were often locked in the dark and unheated stone basement, where disease went unchecked and toilet facilities consisted of community buckets.

Parker's official executioner was George Maledon, a gaunt Civil War veteran of Bavarian extraction who was employed as a guard at the territorial jail. Maledon, often called the "Prince of Hangmen," took pride in his work; he oversaw the construction of the original gallows, which was designed to hang up to a dozen men at once (although six proved to be the official record), and carefully selected and prestretched the "Good Kentucky hemp" rope so that necks would be broken with a minimum of suffering. Maledon was apparently happy to show visitors the ropes he had prepared for the next execution, each ending in a precise hangman's knot with its traditional thirteen wrappings, which would be placed in the hollow behind the victim's left ear.

"The big knot is the secret to a good execution," Maledon once explained. "The right way and the humane way to hang a man is to break his neck, not to strangle him to death."

Although legend has it that Maledon received one hundred dollars for every criminal he sent to the hereafter, no record of any payment above that of his salary as a jailer can be found in the official record. What is noted, however, is Maledon's proficiency with a revolver as well as the rope: on two occasions, he shot to death condemned prisoners who were attempting to escape.

Eight men were sentenced to die during Parker's first term of court, matching the number of men who were condemned to death during the previous four years. Of Parker's eight, one was granted a presidential pardon and another was killed (by Maledon) during an escape attempt. The remaining six met their end together on Sept. 3, 1875, when Maledon tripped the lever on the roomy gallows that stood 150 yards south of the court building.

Five thousand people attended the gruesome public event, lured by the novelty of a mass execution, while Parker watched from a high window.

"It was not I who hanged them," Parker later declared of the seventy-nine men who swung from the Fort Smith gallows at his sentence. "I never hanged a man. It is the law."

Parker felt it was not the severity of punishment that deterred crime, but the *certainty* of punishment. To this end, he appointed two hundred deputy marshals to patrol Indian Territory. These colorful "riding deputies" were as tough as the desperadoes they chased, and often the lines blurred. Two of the Dalton brothers, Frank and Grat, were deputy marshals of the Fort Smith court—although it should be pointed out that Frank, unlike his outlaw brothers, was an upstanding lawman who was killed in the line of duty.

For their services, the riding deputies received the princely sum of two dollars for every arrest warrant served, and two cents for each mile traveled. They furnished their own horses, guns, and ammunition. If they were forced to kill a suspect while attempting to serve a warrant, they received no fee and were required to bury the victim at their own expense. To make conditions worse, they were victimized by the political spoils system of the day: one-quarter of their pay was retained by the United States Deputy Marshal as a condition of their employment. It was not unusual, noted an 1888 report by the Department of Justice, for these riding deputies to return from a harrowing manhunt in the Indian Territory to find themselves in debt.

Many of the deputies, however, didn't return at all. From sixty-five to one hundred, according to the best estimates, were killed in

IF PARKER'S DEPUTIES WERE FORCED TO KILL A SUSPECT WHILE ATTEMPTING TO SERVE A WARRANT, THEY RECEIVED NO FEE.

the line of duty during the twenty-one years of Parker's court.

Although Parker was unsympathetic to the plight of criminals—"I believe in standing on the right side of the innocent . . . the quiet, peaceful, law-abiding citizen. Is there no sympathy for him?"—he did have an interest in legitimate reform. He was often touched when some young man who had done his time in reform school would drop by to thank him for sending him where he could learn a trade.

"Most of them sent to prison in my court were young men or boys whose character was yet unformed, whose moral traits had not yet become sufficiently strong to dominate the mind," Parker said. "These men are largely criminals from surrounding circumstances. Hold out to them an inducement to reform, recognize them as human beings, and there are but a few of them who will not avail themselves of such an opportunity and at least make an effort in the right direction. The want of proper training, ignorance, bad associates, and bad advice, in my experience with these kind of people, have more to do with making them criminals than natural wickedness and inherited depravity."

Another of Parker's noble causes—the protection of Indian Territory from the exploitations of whites—has also been eclipsed by the more sensational aspects of his court.

Parker did not believe that Indian Territory could be protected indefinitely from the encroachment of white civilization, but he was committed to upholding the law and slowing the process. The final result, Parker believed, was that the Five Civilized Tribes of Indian Territory would eventually form a new state.

In 1895, he told a House Judiciary Committee:

"In my judgment (the solution to advancing civilization in Indian Territory) is to give them protection, give them security, give them that administration of the law of the United States. They are working out their own destination, and they are on the road to a final solution of the problem."

Parker kept a Bible near at hand, and many of his sentences and jury instructions are heavy with biblical references. In one celebrated case, in which a defendant named Webster was on trial for murder, Parker intoned: "Thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground . . . From that day to the time when Professor Webster murdered his associate and concealed his remains, this concealment of the evidence of crime has been regarded by the law as a proper fact to be taken into consideration as evidence of guilt." And upon sentencing a man to die: "May God, whose laws you have broken and before whose tribunal you must then appear, have mercy upon your soul."

From the beginning, Parker's court sparked controversy. The mass executions, and their attendant carnival-like atmosphere,

caught the attention of newspapers throughout the country. It wasn't long before Parker was being lauded—or vilified—as "the hanging judge."

What many observers may have missed, however, is the sheer number of cases that Parker heard during his twenty-one years on the bench. Court began daily at 8:30 A.M. and sometimes continued late into the night, with time off only for Sundays and an occasional holiday. More than twelve thousand criminal cases passed before him, including 344 involving capital crimes. Of the 160 men that Parker sentenced to death, only seventy-nine—representing less than one-quarter of the capital cases that came before him—were hanged.

Maledon, who personally tripped the lever on sixty of the seventy-nine men who were hanged at the Fort Smith gallows, was convinced that he had never executed an innocent man. When asked if the ghosts of the dead ever returned to the gallows, Maledon replied: "No, I've never hanged a man who came back to have the job done over."

After his death, Parker's reputation as the hanging judge was sealed in the public's mind by the publication of a volume titled *Hell on the Border; He Hanged Eighty-Eight Men*. The book was written by Samuel W. Harman, but it had been inspired by J. Warren Reed, a criminal lawyer in Parker's court. Despite incorrectly reporting the number of men Parker had sentenced to death, the book (which was reprinted several times) became a major source of information about Parker and his court.

"People have said that I am cruel, heartless, and bloodthirsty," Parker told reporter Ada Patterson in 1896, "but no one has pointed (to) a case of undue severity. I have ever had the single aim of justice in view. No judge who is influenced by any other consideration is fit for the bench. Do equal and exact justice has been my motto."

In 1886, a second gallows (still capable of executing a dozen at a time) was erected with a tall fence around it to keep out the curious. Executions were no longer public events, but were attended only by those who possessed a special ticket to view the proceedings.

Public furor over conditions in the basement jail led, in 1887, to the construction of a new three-story brick jail with modern cells on the south side of the old barracks courthouse. A new courthouse was built in downtown Fort Smith in 1889 and, a year later, the court officially moved.

As more and more Indian land was opened to white settlement during the late 1880s and early 1890s, Parker's authority over Indian Territory lessened. New federal courts were also set up in Kansas and Texas, which dimin-

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ished Parker's jurisdiction. And, when the Supreme Court began reviewing cases involving capital punishment, the last seven years of Parker's term were filled with cases that were reversed or remanded for new trial on grounds that the hanging judge had erred.

Parker, in turn, was outspoken in his criticism of the Supreme Court. He accused the justices of being legal theorists who knew little of criminal trials and who were forgetting the rights of victims.

On Sept. 1, 1896, Parker's jurisdiction—which had been steadily whittled away by other courts and by Congress—was reduced to a few counties in western Arkansas. Other courts were now responsible for the vast and once lawless area known as Indian Territory.

Parker died a few weeks later. At fifty-eight, his hair and beard had turned the purest white. Although the official diagnosis was "dropsy," now called Bright's Disease, the attending physician declared that Parker had died of twenty-one years of overwork.

Note: Fort Smith National Historic Site—where visitors can see a restoration of Judge Parker's courtroom and a replica of George Maledon's gallows—is open from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. daily, except Christmas and New Year's. It is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. More information can be obtained by writing Superintendent, Box 1406, Fort Smith, AR 72902.

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THE ALAMO

5:00 A.M., SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 1836:

As the first glowing stripe of dawn rose on the eastern horizon there was a bugle call and shouts of *"Viva, Santa Anna!"* Then, two thousand Mexican foot soldiers, cavalry, and artillerymen formed up in four columns and marched forward through the dewy grass, their breath visible in the sunrise chill, the soft morning light glinting off their forest of bayonets. Each man was armed with a British-made musket, spare flints, and cartridge packs. Some carried nine-foot lances; others had sabers, pistols, picks, pikes, pry bars, axes, and scaling ladders.

Lithograph of the last stand at the Alamo.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

For thirteen days Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna's artillery had belabored the Alamo and during the siege, sharpshooters from the fortress had picked off thirty of his cannoneers. Last night he had silenced his guns, hoping to lull the weary enemy sentries into napping at their posts.

The president-dictator of Mexico, Santa Anna–self-styled "Napoleon of the West," gam-

bler, opium addict, ruthless but charismatic politician, and ego-driven general of some considerable skill—had come a long way to do battle. He had begun his march north from his capital on November 28, had strengthened his army in Saltillo, two hundred miles south of the Rio Grande, and had crossed the river on February 16 with over two thousand men, twenty-one cannons, eighteen hundred pack mules, thirty-three four-wheeled wagons, and two hundred ammunition carts. On February 20 he camped on the Rio Hondo, fifty miles south of San Antonio de Bexar, and on February 23 arrived in the town and captured it without resistance.

His first act there was to order the raising of a blood-red flag from a church steeple—a warning to the Alamo defenders that no quarter would be given.

East of the town came a quick response—a cannon shot from the Alamo's biggest gun.

Now, after thirteen days, the siege had ended; the battle was at hand.

Inside the battered walls that contained the old Spanish mission, the band of "Texians," numbering on this day of reckoning probably 183 fighting men, took their places along the walls that formed the Alamo's perimeter. Some manned the eighteen serviceable cannons that were mounted on ramps and scaffolds along the ramparts and church top and surveyed their scarce ammunition supply, including the chopped up horseshoes, nails, and random iron pieces that would eventually have to be used. Others checked their musket and pistol loads, shot pouches and powder horns, took their stations, and waited.

On the north wall, his double-barreled shotgun propped beside him as he watched the advancing enemy through his glass, stood

SANTA ANNA'S FIRST ACT WAS TO ORDER THE RAISING OF A BLOOD-RED FLAG FROM A CHURCH STEEPLE—A WARNING TO THE ALAMO DEFENDERS THAT NO QUARTER WOULD BE GIVEN.

the commander of the Alamo's defenders, Lt. Col. William Barrett Travis of the Texian cavalry, a fiery, red-haired, twenty-seven-year-old South Carolina gentleman lawyer who doted on Sir Walter Scott's works and who believed military glory was his destiny.

Defending a portion of the south wall with his dozen Tennessee Mounted Volunteers, dressed in buckskins and his trademark coonskin cap, was David Crockett, forty-nine, the legendary marksman, backwoods orator, humorist, and three-term congressman. He had come to the Alamo on February 8 with his fiddle and his long rifle, "Betsy," and with the men he had collected on his long ride from Nacogdoches. "I have come to aid you all I can in your noble cause," he told Travis.

On the roof of the Alamo chapel, helping serve the cannon there, was Travis's South Carolina boyhood friend and fellow lawyer, Lt. James Butler Bonham, twenty-nine, who had journeyed to San Antonio de Bexar after Travis had written him of the "stirring times" in Texas. As a courier, he had made two dangerous trips out of the besieged Alamo since arriving there with Bowie on January 18.

In his room in the low barracks on the southeast wall, near where Crockett and his Tennesseans were stationed, forty-year-old Col. James Bowie lay sick in his cot. He had a persistent cold, fever, and painful cough—perhaps incipient tuberculosis or pneumonia—and had injured himself

LEFT: BETTMANN ARCHIVE; NEAR LEFT: STOCK MONTAGE

while helping hoist a cannon to the wall top. A Kentuckian, Bowie had a spotty history. He had sold contraband slaves in Louisiana (working, legend has it, for the pirate Jean Lafitte) and worthless land titles in Arkansas, had drifted to Texas in 1828 and married into the prominent Veramendi family in San Antonio. In September 1833, his wife and two children had died of cholera, a tragedy that haunted Bowie and drove him to occasional drunkenness.

He had ridden into San Antonio with thirty men on January 19 on orders from Sam Houston, commander of the Texas army, to assist in evacuating the place. Houston wanted to fight Santa Anna in a hit-and-run war of attrition in which the Texians would move over familiar terrain and force the Mexicans to follow, extending them from their supply bases. He had no interest in a standstill fight inside stone walls and wanted the Alamo's guns removed, its walls blown down, its occupants to march with him in the open.

But when Bowie, joined by Travis and his men, found the Alamo garrison anxious to fight, he began assisting in shoring up the defenses rather than tearing them down.

There was no love lost between the two men. Bowie was the senior officer and had command of the Alamo at the beginning, but his drinking offended the proud and proper Travis. In mid-February he and Bowie reached an agreement on a joint command, but this became untenable and quickly soured. Then, on February 24, the first day of the siege, Bowie, whose health had collapsed to the point he had to retire to his bed, turned over full command to Travis.

The Alamo fortress had the rough shape of two adjacent rectangles, one large, one small, with the church at the southeast corner, next to the small rectangle that contained a hospital, horse and cattle pens, and the infantry barracks. The larger area had walls twelve to twenty-two feet high and enclosed barrack rooms, officers' quarters, a well, a guardhouse, and artillery emplacements, including the "lunette," a U-shaped gun position that jutted out from the south wall. On a large barbette (platform) on the southwest corner of the plaza was located the largest of the defenders' cannons, an eighteen pounder (for the weight of the ball it fired).

The Alamo's guns, varying from four- to twelve-pounders and with the single eighteen, were commanded by a twenty-six-year-old Tennessee blacksmith, Capt. Almeron Dickinson.

Even as he watched Santa Anna's army advance that chill dawning of March 6, Travis held out hope that reinforcements would come to assist him. Ten days ago he had sent a courier to Col. James Fannin in Goliad, about ninety miles to the southeast, hoping the Texas army regulars there would come as a relief force. But Fannin, who set out for San Antonio on February 26 with 320 men, suffered some minor mishaps on the trail—a supply wagon broke down, some oxen ran loose—and on

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Some of the major participants in the battle (from left): Antonio López de Santa Anna, James Bowie, William Barrett Travis, and Davy Crockett.

February 27 marched his force back to Goliad.

On February 24, Travis scribbled a message to "The People of Texas and all Americans in the world," underlined one phrase, triple-underlined the last three words, and sent thirty-year-old Capt. Albert Martin, a good horseman who knew the roads out of San Antonio, to carry it through the enemy lines. Martin was to deliver the appeal to the town of Gonzalez, seventy miles away, and to have couriers take copies of it to Goliad, San Felipe, Washington-on-the-Brazos (which, on March 1, became the first capital of the Texas Republic), Nacogdoches, south to the Gulf, on to New Orleans, and other places near and far.

Travis's message, one of the immortal documents of Texas history, was addressed to "Fellow Citizens and Compatriots" and said:

> I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual bombardment & cannonade for twenty-four hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls—*I shall never surrender or retreat.* Then, I call on you in the name of liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch—The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country—Victory or Death.

Martin delivered Travis's message to Gonzales and returned to the Alamo with thirty-two volunteers on March 1, the day Texas officially declared its independence from Mexico. Travis's stirring message was known throughout the South within two weeks and had reached New York and Washington by March 30, by which time, of course, it was very old news indeed.

On March 5, Travis called the garrison together and announced that he believed there would be no reinforcements, no relief. He told his Texians that their options were limited: they could surrender, attempt to escape, or stay and fight. He is said to have drawn a line in the dirt with his sword and invited all who would stay to cross the line. Only one man held back—a Frenchman named Louis "Moses" Rose who had fought with Napoleon's army and who had come to the Alamo with Bowie's men. Rose elected to escape and did so that night. (He lived to tell the tale and died in 1850 in Louisiana.)

Crockett was heard to say, "I think we had better march out and die in the open air. I don't like to be hemmed up."

But hemmed up they were that frosty morning of March 6, 1836, at the Alamo in San Antonio de Bexar in the Mexican province of Texas y Coahuila—183 fighting men facing more than ten times that number of advancing enemy.

How did it come to this?

The place of the siege and battle was founded in 1718 by Father Antonio de San Buenaventura Olivares of the Franciscan College of Querétaro, Mexico, and given the name Misión San Antonio de Valero after the Spanish Viceroy of Mexico, the Marqués de Valero. At about the time the mission opened, Don Martín de Alarcón, appointed governor of the Spanish province of Texas, established the *presidio* (garrisoned fort) of San Antonio de Bexar near the mission, bordered by San Pedro Creek on the west and a horseshoe bend of the San Antonio River on the east.

The original mission, more a collection of adobe huts than a single building, was moved several times to locations along the San Antonio River as it worked to convert local Indian tribes to Christianity. In 1801, Spanish troops from the pueblo of San José y Santiago del Alamo del Parras were stationed in San Antonio de Bexar and the name *alamo* (a type of poplar tree) was attached to the mission.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century the American influence in Texas began having an impact. Two events are particularly noteworthy: In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase placed the southwestern U.S. border alongside that of the Spanish-ruled province of Texas and, in 1821, the Spanish were driven from Mexico after a three-century rule. Mexico's new status as a republic generated a liberal constitution, adopted in 1824, a provision of which encouraged American emigration to Texas. Attractive land grants and other rewards were offered to those willing to renounce their American citizenship and to follow the laws of Mexico and the tenets of the Catholic Church.

Within a decade, thirty thousand Americans emigrated to Texas. But in 1834 Santa Anna abolished the constitution of 1824, enacted stiff new tariffs, garrisoned his country's northern outposts, declared martial law, and abruptly stopped the flow of American settlers to the province of Texas y Coahuila.

In Texas, the reaction to these

maneuvers was a call to arms and an appeal for volunteers to fight for independence. War with Mexico was now a certainty.

Sam Houston, veteran of the Creek War, friend of the Cherokee (who bestowed the names "The Raven" and "Big Drunk" on him), former congressman, former governor of Tennessee, came to Texas for the first time in 1832 and was named commander-in-chief of the Texas Army in November 1835. A month later, Texian troops and a ragtag contingent of volunteers undertook to liberate San Antonio de Bexar and its fortified mission, key to the defense of Texas from attack from the south. Commanding the Mexican troops in San Antonio was General Martin Perfecto de Cós, Santa Anna's brother-in-law, and while Cós withstood the siege for five weeks, he surrendered on December 10 and was permitted to retire with his troops across the Rio Grande.

Now, with the town and the fort occupied by the Texas insurgents, the Alamo's defenses were improved, stores and ammunition stockpiled, reinforcements eagerly awaited.

And in the meantime, General Santa Anna, having organized his army at San Luis Potosí, marched north to the Rio Grande to retake San Antonio de Bexar and the Alamo.

The storming of the Alamo was not so much a battle as a melee and a slaughter. The Mexican columns struck the four walls more or less simultaneously, with the greatest concentration on the north side where Travis, saber in hand, stood on the rampart shouting, "Hurrah, m'boys! Give 'em hell!" and, directing his words to Capt. Juan Sequin's company of Mexican defenders, "*No rendirse, muchachos!*" ("Don't give up, boys!"). The Texian cannon cut a bloody swath through the enemy columns until the guns could not be depressed enough to have effect. The attackers managed to prop their scaling ladders against the walls but were repelled time and again in hand-to-hand combat with sword, shotgun, pistol, and close-range musket fire that created a dense clot of dead and wounded below—bodies trampled over by the oncoming waves of Santa Anna's troops.

As the first wave hit the north wall, Travis grabbed his shotgun and fired both barrels point-blank at the jostling enemy soldiers below. Almost instantly a sniper's bullet struck him in the head and he fell, rolling down the earthen cannon ramp to the ground. He died within minutes.

Meantime, despite the withering fire from the muskets of the Texians (many of whom had four or five loaded weapons stacked at the ready) and the devastating effect of cannon fire directed by Captain Dickinson, the Mexicans regrouped at the north and west walls and made some progress. Those on the east and south, where Crockett and his men defended, were stalled momentarily by the brutal fire from the six-pounders in the lunette and the cannon on the Alamo church roof where Dickinson, Bonham, and their gunners worked furiously.

The Mexican columns on the east and west side of the Alamo surged toward those still struggling for a foothold on the north, resulting in the formation of a frenzied and disorganized mob that was decimated by the fish-in-a-barrel musketry from above.

Santa Anna, observing the battle from an earthwork to the northeast of the fortress, now called up his reserves, including the elite grenadiers and *zapadores* (engineers). These four hundred men rushed forward as Mexican bandsmen struck up the eerie Spanish march known as the "Degüello," signifying there would be no quarter and no prisoners.

The Alamo's Achilles' heel—an ill-repaired breech in the eastern sector of the north wall—was now found and exploited, and the Mexicans made their way into the Alamo's central compound. At about the same time, on the west side, the thinning ranks of Texians could not fend off the enemy pouring over the parapets and massing inside the wall. On the southwest corner, the great eighteen-pounder emplacement was captured and turned against the cannon on the church roof, killing Dickinson, Bonham, and their gunners. Crockett and his Tennesseans were caught in the open in front of the church and hospital and all killed—Crockett by a saber blow "just above the right eye," according to Mexican Sergeant Felix Nuñez, who said the Tennessean shot and clubbed eight of the attackers before he fell.

As the Mexicans captured the church, Robert Evans, the Alamo's big, good-humored, Irish-born master of ordnance, though wounded, grabbed a torch and made his way to blow up the powder magazine on the north side of the building. He fell from musket fire within feet of his objective.

Santa Anna's troops, by now overrunning the entire fortress, broke into the hospital and killed forty men there, entered each room of the barracks and shot all inside, and, in the low barracks on the south wall, found the pale, fevered Jim Bowie in his cot. As he rose to defend himself with a brace of pistols given him by Crockett, he was bayoneted to death. His sister-in-law, who was present, said the Mexican soldiers "tossed his body on their bayonets until their uniforms were dyed with his blood."

By 6:30 A.M. the fighting was over and Santa Anna hewed to his red-flag warning and to the meaning of the "Degüello": all who bore arms were killed, including the

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Lithograph of the Alamo and its surroundings during the battle.

two young sons of English-born gunner Antony Wolfe. Jacob Walker of Nacogdoches, who sought protection in the church sacristy where Susannah Dickinson, widow of the slain artillery commander, awaited the end, was found, shot, and carried from the room on bayonets.

Six prisoners were brought before the general. He was infuriated that they had been spared even momentarily and ordered them executed on the spot.

About thirteen noncombatants survived, including ten Mexican women (two of them Bowie's sisters-in-law) and children, Mrs. Dickinson and her fifteen-month-old daughter Angelina, and Travis's slave, Joe.

The Mexican dead and wounded numbered about six hundred.

After Santa Anna had seen the corpses of Travis, Crockett, Bowie, and others, he ordered the bodies of all the Texians burned. The Mexican dead were placed in trenches and covered over.

For Santa Anna, the victory was to be short-lived and bitter. On March 27 he ordered the massacre of over 340 Texian prisoners at Goliad (known as La Bahía to the Mexicans), including Col. James Fannin, who had failed in his efforts to lead a relief force to the Alamo. But under the rallying cries of "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!", Sam Houston's force of eight hundred men met the general and his three thousand man army at San Jacinto on April 21—forty-six days after the fall of the Alamo. In an eighteen-minute battle, Houston, who lost two men and had twenty-three wounded, routed the Mexicans, killing 640 and taking 730 prisoner. Included among the captives was Santa Anna who, fearing execution, signed an order for all Mexican troops to retreat south of the Rio Grande. He was released from custody in November and retired, temporarily, to his hacienda in Veracruz.

"It was but a small affair," Santa Anna said of the Alamo, but Texans tend to think of it as a bit larger affair, comparing it to the Persians and Spartans at Thermopylae, seeing the old fortified church and its grounds as a sort of Valhalla of Texas heroes and placing those ninety deadly minutes in 1836 as the cornerstone of Texas independence and ultimately, of statehood.

In 1936, when the state of Texas unveiled at the Alamo a monument depicting Travis, Crockett, Bowie, and Bonham, and listing all the Texans who fell there, the inscription on the statue summed up the meaning of the place and the battle to Texas then and since:

> They chose never to surrender or retreat; these brave hearts, with flag still proudly waving, perished in the flames of immortality, that their high sacrifice might lead to the founding of this Texas.

THE ALAMO TODAY

The mission church and buildings of the Alamo have been in the custody of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas since 1905. To this date the DRT maintains the "Shrine of Texas Liberty" without cost to the state or federal government and without charging an admission fee, relying solely on donations and proceeds from its gift shop to preserve the grounds and buildings.

The Alamo grounds consist of

the Shrine of Texas Liberty—the Alamo church—the Long Barrack Museum, and the Alamo Museum, containing exhibits, firearms (including David Crockett's long rifle, "Betsy"), a detailed model of the fort as it appeared in 1836, paintings, manuscripts, maps, and commemorative tablets.

On the street adjacent to the Alamo stands the huge and magnificent white marble monument by sculptor Pompeo Coppini, "In memory of the heroes who sacrificed their lives at the Alamo, March 6, 1836, in the defense of Texas," erected by the State of Texas in 1936 to commemorate one hundred years of Texas independence. It is an awesome work with the figures of Bowie and Bonham overlooking the Alamo grounds and, on the street side, Travis and Crockett gazing out anachronistically at a row of shops along Alamo Plaza—Wendy's, Alamo Plaza Shirts, Uncle Hoppy's Bar-B-Que, F. W. Woolworth, and Burger King.

The great statue's epigraph states: "From the fire that burned their bodies rose the eternal spirit of sublime heroic sacrifice which gave birth to an empire state."

The Alamo is in the precise center of downtown San Antonio between Houston and East Commerce Streets, and can be reached by Interstates 10 and 35.

SUGGESTED READING

Baugh, Virgil E. *Rendezvous at the Alamo.* New York: Pageant Press, 1960; reprinted by University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

Lord, Walter. *A Time to Stand: The Epic of the Alamo.* New York: Harper & Row, 1962; reprinted by University of Nebraska Press, 1978.

Nevin, David. *The Texans.* New York: Time-Life, 1975.

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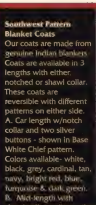

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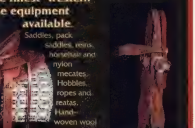

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PHOTO BY PAT EVANS

When Max Evans's novel, *Bluefeather Fellini*, appeared in 1993, Ralph Looney, retired editor of the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Albuquerque Tribune*, summed up in two sentences a sentiment about Evans that his western writing colleagues, historians and critics of western literature, and his fans have been saying for decades. Writing for the Scripps-Howard Wire Service, Looney said, "If there is anybody on this earth who truly understands the American West, it's Max Evans. He was born in it, cowboyed in it, brawled in it, probably howled

BY DALE L. WALKER

at the moon in it, mined it, painted it, loved it, raised a family in it, and wrote eighteen books about it."

Max Evans was born in Ropes, Texas, southwest of Lubbock, in 1924, the son of ranching parents. Before his twelfth birthday he was working as a cowboy on a cattle outfit near Santa Fe, and when he was sixteen he *owned* his own spread in Union County, New Mexico.

A CONVERSATION WITH MAX EVANS

Then war interrupted Evans's ranching career and he joined the army, survived the D-1 Omaha Beach landing, and fought with the combat infantry through three major campaigns in France and Germany.

After the war he returned to New Mexico, sold his ranch, and moved to Taos in 1949 to pursue a career as an artist. He says that he made the move "with a concept in my head and a firm belief that I would become rich and famous within about a year. Of course, what happened within a year was that I was broke and infamous." On the

"Max has a face that has not only been lived in but worked on by outside forces—namely horses and fists."

plus side, in 1949 he married Pat James, an accomplished artist (they have twin daughters, Charlotte and Sheryl, born in 1954), and began a serious study of painting with Woody Crumbo, the renowned Pottawatomie Indian artist.

But Evans's success as an artist was not entirely satisfying to him. "I realized," he reflects, "that I was not saying what I wanted to say in my paintings. Writing is what I really wanted to do." By the time his first book, a collection of stories titled *Southwest Wind*, was published in 1958, he was also trading in land, buying and selling antiques, automobiles, horses, and mines. The mining business, in fact, became a serious involvement and Evans's encyclopedic, hands-on knowledge of mining and miners is demonstrated in the author's most recent and most ambitious novel, *Bluefeather Fellini*, which, on a small scale, is about mining, on the larger one, about life, a life's quest for answers, and those beautiful but often cruel answers.

Starting out as a professional writer at age thirty-four, Evans has been a consistent producer of memorable fiction and even some nonfiction. His forte is the American cowboy—not the drugstore, mechanical bull-riding, Nashville singing, or any of the other all-hat-and-no-cows varieties, but the real, sweating, scuffed, scarred and stove up, horse-breaking, cowherding, sometimes drunk and always broke cowboy, of which Evans was one in fact and remains one in spirit. His stories and novellas have appeared in prestigious literary publications and popular magazines—he is a mainstay writer for that finest of western literary journals, *The South Dakota Review*. His work has been adapted to feature and documentary films and he has won awards from Western Writers of America and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Evans's work includes *Long John Dunn of Taos* (1959), *The Rounders* (1960), *The Hi-Lo Country* (1961), *The One-Eyed Sky* (1963), *The Mountain of Gold* (1965), *The Shadow of Thunder* (1969), *My Partner* (1972), *Sam Peckinpah, Master of Violence* (1972), *Bobby Jack Smith You Dirty Coward* (1974), *The White Shadow* (1977), *Xavier's Folly and Other Stories* (1984), *Super Bull and Other True Escapades* (1986), *The Orange County Cowboys* (1988), *Candles in the Bottom of the Pool* (1988), *Rounders 3* (1990), *Old Bum* (1992), *Bluefeather Fellini* (1993), and forthcoming in 1994, *Bluefeather Fellini in the Sacred Realm*.

The Rounders, in which he introduced cowboy immortals Dusty Rhodes and Wrangler Lewis, two old hands working on the Hi-Lo Ranch, was a bestseller in book form that was transformed into a memorable 1965 film with Henry Fonda and Glenn Ford and an ABC television series with Patrick Wayne and Chill Wills.

Evans's introduction to Hollywood included a long and close friendship with director Sam Peckinpah, whom Evans has described as "mean and crazy as a gut-shot javelina, and as tender as a windless dawn." Evans even had an acting stint in Peckinpah's *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* in 1970, riding shotgun on a stagecoach with that fine character actor, Slim Pickens.

Evans says his most recent work, *Bluefeather Fellini*, a novel of the life and adventures of a half-Italian, half-Taos Indian prospector, began in his mind forty-four years ago and slowly evolved from a five-page story to a thousand-page manuscript and two long novels.

In a newspaper story I once wrote about Max Evans, I described him as "a recognizable man," and quoted a mutual friend who said, "Max has a face that has not only been lived in but worked on by outside forces—namely horses and fists." He is an unmistakable ex-cowboy, signs his beautifully scrawled, funny, and mildly profane handwritten letters to friends, "Ol' Max Evans," and is one of the finest writers in America.

He answered *LLWM*'s questions from his home in Albuquerque.

LLWM: First, I have a coyote question. There are a lot of coyotes in your stories and they are always treated with affection, unlike the way they are treated by most cattle people. Do you have an affinity for coyotes?

EVANS: I respect coyotes more than anything except my memory for Federico Fellini and his films. Since I still survive off the streets and backyard literary garage sales, and have most of my life, it is only natural that I admire the greatest survivor of all, the coyote. They are challenged with the deadliest of poisons, trapped with steel and snare, hunted with trail hounds, blasted from airplanes with shotguns. If it was financially feasible, army tanks and

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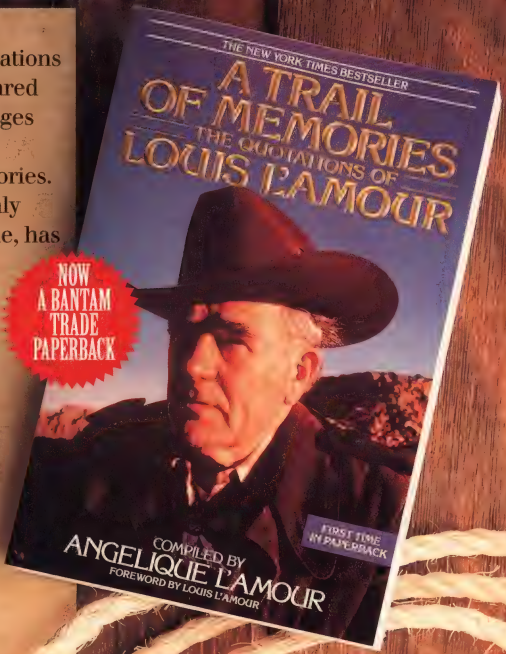

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two-thousand-pound smart bombs would be used against them. Yet they survive and multiply, even adapting to the interior of such cities as Los Angeles; Boulder, Colorado; and others.

LLWM: What is your favorite coyote encounter story?

EVANS: Egotistically, it's one of my own—"The One-Eyed Sky"—which will be reprinted in a collection of seven of my novellas titled *Spinning Sun, Grinning Moon,* published next spring by Red Crane Books. Incidentally, no one should be so presumptuous as to blame a rancher for destroying a killer coyote that takes his calves or sheep and consequently the livelihood of his family. The problem is bigger and becoming insoluable. It springs from the deepest instincts of both humans and coyotes—to protect and propagate their species.

LLWM: Expand on that a bit.

EVANS: Well, if humans survive their idiotic follies of war, divisiveness, and viruses, they will eventually pave over the coyote's space. But we will pay a heavy price. I believe that when the coyote is gone, we will disappear shortly thereafter. The greatest service science could do for Mother Earth is to figure a way to cross humans, coyotes, and cockroaches. Now there would be one unbeatable s.o.b.!

LLWM: You told Patricia O'Connor in a *New Mexico Magazine* interview that "the biggest and best thing that ever happened to the U.S. is the western, and we are risking its demise." Tell us more about that.

EVANS: There is a dire need for *both* western myth and reality. The fact is that western books, magazines, and films have given most of the world wondrous escapism and adventure for all this century. In admitting that we are not universally loved by other nations, for obvious reasons besides jealousy, the western becomes more important than ever. It is the *one* purely American creation left that the rest of the world still admires. Foreign visitors to the Southwest wish to see, in this order, cowboys, Indians, and the colorful landscape. Among the many things never asked about are politicians, high-rise developers, and pop psychologists.

LLWM: In your artist days you painted over three hundred watercolors and oils for private collectors and museums. Have you missed painting?

EVANS: I miss it a lot and wish I had a little time from this coyote writing world to do it selfishly, just for my own pleasure. I quit painting with great torment, but didn't feel I was saying what I wanted and needed to say about the adventurous reality of the contemporary West. I threw away the brush and started painting with the pen.

LLWM: Tell us something about the book you are writing about that "crazy genius"—your words—Sam Peckinpah.

EVANS: Well, right after Peckinpah died, December 28, 1984, I was offered a chance by two editors to do his biography. It was tempting, but I couldn't tell anyone that I was preparing over thirty years of notes, research, and agony, getting ready to begin the novel of my life—I was warming up for *Bluefeather Fellini.* I had written one small book on Peckinpah in 1972 and was already writing another, very personal memoir of the great mad film director. I literally made prayers that the right person would do the biography. To my relief, David Weddle, a friend of the Peckinpah family, took it on and I just read the advance copy of Weddle's *If They Move . . . Kill 'Em,* which Grove Press will publish this September. He has written 560 forceful, living pages permanently perpetuating the deserving legend. I have about sixty or ninety days of writing time to finish my little book on Sam and feel strongly that the two different approaches will complement each other. The single driving force is this fact: The wild man created the greatest western film ever made, *The Wild Bunch.*

LLWM: Let's talk about *Bluefeather Fellini.* When I first read it, it was a thousand manuscript pages and you were having a fine time trying to find a publisher for it. How many publishers saw it before University Press of Colorado signed it up?

EVANS: Six. Three of the editors wanted to do it but were cut off by executives, one didn't like anything about it, and two others said it was a masterpiece but they simply couldn't publish it. I was negotiating with two other houses

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when I decided to go with the University Press of Colorado, whose director, Luther Wilson, is courageous. *Bluefeather Fellini* is a truly original work and everybody must know by now that originality is a mortal sin in some arenas such as movies, television, books, politics, computers, fashion, music, genetics, and most everything else endlessly marching on in increasingly boring repetition.

LLWM: The battle scenes in *Bluefeather*, which critics have likened to Ernest Hemingway and James Jones, are very gripping and vivid, nearly a half century after the events they describe, and I know they were based on your own experiences as a combat infantryman at Normandy and in Europe in World War II. Are you still haunted by those experiences?

EVANS: I jumped at every car that backfired and dug into the covers with dreams of those bloody German 88s exploding for a year or so after I came back. Then it slowly vanished because I was plunging in at cowboying, ranching, painting, mining, not to mention the superhuman energy it took to have all that youthful fun raising hell. What haunts me yet and forever is the human obsession with slaughtering one another. This foul business has not diminished since I can remember. It is stupidity on the grandest of all scales, and a sadness beyond reasoning.

LLWM: *Bluefeather* has gotten a terrific number of rave reviews and is being hailed as a masterpiece. Now the sequel takes Bluefeather on a quest that is quite different from the realistic nature of the first book. What is your guess as to the critical reception of "Blue Number Two"?

EVANS: Well, *Bluefeather Fellini in the Sacred Realm* is simply a larger part of the whole duo. It includes a mystery; a powerful love story between ol' Blue and a strong, highly intelligent woman; the underground of Indian legend and belief; savage battles with beasts—the worst of which is man; and the quest for the greatest treasure the world has ever known. That's a helluva big bite for most people to swallow, so I imagine the reviews will be wildly mixed.

LLWM: You are prepared for being compared to Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs? Do you think the sequel will be understood?

EVANS: I'm prepared for anything. I think the critics who have lived boldly and been open to all things will love it; others will be confused, and will therefore hate it. Most people grow to despise what they can't relegate to their own personal norm. Originality has always been dangerous. I expect a fifty-fifty split on the reviews. Hell, I only made prayers to *finish* the cockeyed story. Everything else is gourmet gravy.

LLWM: Is there a Max Evans "message" in the *Bluefeather* books?

EVANS: Not a deliberate one, but I learned a lot while working on the book about the importance of keeping an open mind to *all* elements of the earthly and spiritual worlds. I also relearned the fact that the art of having fun must become as natural to us as drinking water to balance the daily disasters that befall us.

LLWM: Are you tired of being asked how you went from a writer of novellas and short stories to a novel of such a length as *Bluefeather*?

EVANS: I've admired and loved reading such great short novels as Walter V. Tiberg Clark's *Hook*, Gogol's *Overcoat*, Faulkner's *The Bear*, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Balzac's *The Fatal Skin*, Maugham's *Rain* and Collette's *Gigi*. I've always been drawn to the challenge of writing distilled stories and still leaving them fluid. But besides my own novellas, my novels—*The Rounders*, *The Hi-Lo Country*, and others—are tightly written and tell quite a bit of entertaining truth, I believe. Anyway, it was all good training for *Bluefeather*, so I don't care how many times I'm asked about the strange transition. It was simply addition to me!

LLWM: You turned seventy in August. Are you slowing down?

EVANS: I have either been cursed or blessed by being a late bloomer. Since I'm in good health, I suspect the latter. I have uncountable books and stories in my head and soul that I'd like to do as I am just now reaching my peak writing ability.

LLWM: Maybe you don't know it, but you are not only a great

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writer, but known among publishers as a legendary no-holds-barred truth-teller.

EVANS: Reminds me of an old cowboy friend who would get drunk and get into some kind of trouble every Saturday night in town. A couple of small-town cops saw him walking from one bar to another and thought they might have to throw him into jail again. They drove up beside him and, noticing he was walking with one booted foot on the curb and the other in the gutter, asked him if he was drunk. "I better be," he said without looking at them, "or otherwise I'm sure as hell bad crippled up." That makes me think of my relationship with publishers. My wife and my friends have often told me I'm far too straightforward with them. This is strange to me as this trait is what publishers say they like—even insist on—in the heroes of their contracted stories, yet can't seem to abide in their authors. I still believe if one would have the guts to saddle up and ride *all the way*, we'd win the finals.

LLWM: Let's hope that happens. Meantime, what Max Evans will we be seeing next?

EVANS: *Bluefeather Fellini in the Sacred Realm* will be out in hardcover from the University Press of Colorado in September; *Bluefeather Fellini* is to be out as a Bantam paperback in November; *Spinning Sun, Grinning Moon* will be out next spring; and I have two short novels eating at me, one of which is *King of Taos,* which has been lying there in first draft for over twenty years, waiting impatiently for me to give it full grown lungs. I'm about ready.

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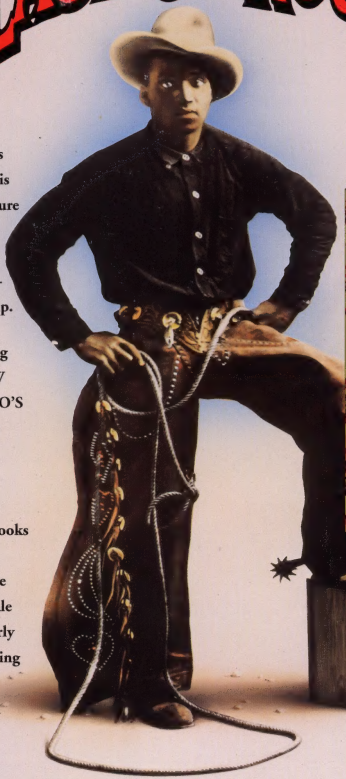

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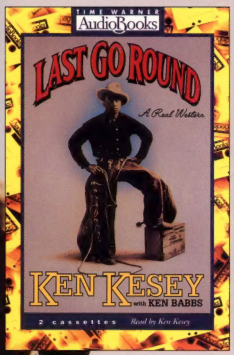

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